



# DECADENCE



by the same author



*Matter, Life and Value*

*Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*

*Guide to Philosophy*

*Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*

*Philosophy for Our Times*

*Return to Philosophy*

*Etc.*

# DECADENCE

---

*A Philosophical Inquiry*

by

C. E. M. JOAD

FABER AND FABER LIMITED

24 Russell Square

London

*First published in mcmxlviii  
by Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1  
Printed in Great Britain by  
Purnell and Sons Limited  
Paulton, Somerset, and London  
All rights reserved*

## CONTENTS

---

Statement

*page 11*

### Part I

#### THE PRINCIPLES OF DECADENCE

I.	Introductory. The Function of Philosophy in the Contemporary World	19
II.	Decadence: Some Definitions Discussed and Rejected	55
III.	Some Considerations on the Agreeableness and Fertility of so-called Decadent Ages	71
IV.	Proposed Definition of Decadence	95
V.	Some Criticisms and Consequences of the 'Dropping of the Object'	118
VI.	Analysis of the Activity of Knowing	128
VII.	A Criticism of Subjectivism in Logic, in Morals and in Aesthetics	145
VIII.	Education, Art and Religion as the Revelation of Objective Fact	163
IX.	The 'Psychologizing' of Morals and of Thinking	195
X.	The 'Dropping of the Object' in Biology and Social Ethics	227

### Part II

#### APPLICATIONS. DECADENCE IN OUR TIME

	Introduction to Part II	247
XI.	The Culture of the Many in All Times but particularly in Our Own	251

## CONTENTS

XII.	The Literary Culture of Our Time	<i>page</i> 284
XIII.	Application to Politics	321
XIV.	Specialization and Decadence	348
XV.	Speculations	385
	Summary	422
	Index of Names	425

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

The following have read parts of this book in manuscript:

Dr. Saw, chapters i., vi., vii., ix. and x.;  
Somerset Maugham, chapters i. and xii.;  
William Glock, chapter viii.;  
Sir Kenneth Clark, chapter xii.,  
Kingsley Martin, chapters xiii., and xv.

My thanks are due to them for making comments and suggestions, many of which have been incorporated. Nobody but myself is, however, responsible for the views expressed.

My thanks are also due to the editor of *Polemic* for permission to reprint in chapter x part of an article which originally appeared in the first number of that journal, and to Birkbeck College for permission to include in chapter xiv material originally delivered and printed as an Inter-Faculty Lecture.

C. E. M. JOAD

*Hampstead*

*May 1945—March 1947*



## Statement

**I**t seems advisable to begin with a short statement indicating the general background of belief from which this book springs and which it is designed to illustrate.

Greek mythology contains a legend of the war between the Titans and the gods. The Titans symbolize men seeking to aspire above their human stature and to make themselves equal with the gods. They are men 'getting above themselves'. The gods win and the Titans are cast down.

The following, as I see it, is the same moral stated in modern terms. The natural order of things existing in time and space is not the only order; there is also an order of reality not subject to time and space from which the natural order derives and to which it is subject. The non-natural order contains values of which truth, goodness and beauty are the most eminent; it also contains God. It may well be, as Christian theologians have maintained, that the values are the modes of God's manifestation, the ways in which He reveals Himself in the world, reveals Himself, therefore, to man.

Man belongs for the most part to the natural order, although there is also comprised in his make-up an element, the soul or spirit, which is akin to, which perhaps belongs to the non-natural order. Man, therefore, in common with the rest of the natural order, is subject to the non-natural. His status is that of a being subordinate to something other than himself, and his life is, accordingly, governed by laws not of his making. Now this 'something other' is not external nature of which, by a sufficient extension of the power resulting from the development of scientific technique, he may ultimately obtain complete control.

Since perfection belongs to the non-natural order and man, with the reservation mentioned above, does not, perfection is not to be found on the plane of the human or in any conceivable



## STATEMENT

development or extension of the human. Value, therefore, does not, except derivatively, belong to the human. Man may aspire to value, know value, pursue value, reflect it in his life and through his vision of it bring it to birth in his works, but with the probable exception of the value, goodness, value remains other than man. Hence, apart from goodness, which is the specific excellence of the soul, the non-natural element in man, value belongs (except derivatively) not to the human but to the non-human. This is not a depressing view. On the contrary, the conviction that what is good and beautiful has its origin in and derives its authority from some other plane of reality, a conviction which is less of reason than of spirit, invests our own world with a significance it had otherwise lacked, assuring us as it does that the beauty of the sunset means more than the beauty of the sunset, the worth of the selfless act more than the worth of the selfless act.

This attitude to the universe has been on the whole predominant in our civilization. First adopted by the Greeks, it was confirmed and elaborated by Christianity and forms part of the Christian tradition of Western Europe. Periods occur when it is largely forgotten or denied, with the result that the nature of the universe is misinterpreted and man's status in it misconceived.

These are periods of great material prosperity and technical advance, usually regarded as periods of 'progress'; they are also the aftermaths of such periods. They are usually associated with the growth of urban civilization and the achievement of a highly complex life by the inhabitants of large cities. Among their characteristics four may be noticed.

First, from the standpoint of theory, man having enjoyed a long period of success believes that nothing is impossible to him. He is, he feels, the arbiter of his fate and his fortune; the future is his for the making. 'Men,' as Alberti, the Renaissance Florentine, put it, 'can do all things if they will.' Hence, the belief in a non-human order lapses and the feeling that man's life is subject to it is lost.

Secondly, from the standpoint of practice, man's area of choice is greatly extended. Social, urban, civilized man has a greater and more varied field for action and experience than savage man, primitive man, or rural man. Kings have a greater variety of

## STATEMENT

choice than slaves ; generals than captives ; dwellers in cities than peasants. . . . In the periods of which I am speaking it seems to me that this enlargement of the scope of choice may be indefinitely extended. Ranges of power, varieties of sensation, the elaboration of patterns of life hitherto undreamt of are deemed to be both possible and practicable. This greater opportunity and variety of choice is largely conditioned by man's power over nature. Therefore, progress, as objectively conceived, becomes identified with increase of power over man's physical environment.

Thirdly, there is an increased sensibility to sensation. This is due partly to the increased range of choice to which I have referred—men are subjected to an ever increasing variety of stimuli—partly and more pertinently to the development of art. For art opens up to man new ranges of experience. The aesthetic man deliberately seeks to extend his sensibility and so to train and refine his senses that they become capable of affording ever more exquisite harmonies of sensation. Now increase of sensibility is an extension of self, since at the level of sensation the most consciously sensitive man is also the man who is most consciously aware of himself. Hence, (a) experience comes to be regarded as an end in itself, and the more varied and highly coloured, the better—‘I want to eat the fruit of all the trees of the garden of the world,’ said Oscar Wilde; (b) the self, which is the seat of experience, becomes the centre of interest and the satisfaction of its desires, the standard of value. Progress, then, as subjectively conceived, is identified with the cultivation and enlargement of the self.

Fourthly, science which both explores and gives power over nature refuses, not surprisingly, to recognize the existence of any realm in which its writ does not run. It insists, then, that there is no other order of being other than the natural order of events in space-time. Reality, in short, is all of a piece. The success of science enables it to form the climate of the time with the result that the beliefs of the scientists of one generation become the accepted attitudes of the common man in the next. Hence arises a tendency to deny objectivity to moral laws and validity to moral ideals, and to represent duty and obligation as fairy tales which men have invented to encourage and confirm those who

## STATEMENT

behave in ways of which society approves and to deter those who might feel tempted to transgress its ordinances. The religious tradition which might have checked the tendency to deprive morality of its objective backing itself falls victim to the same tendency.

Now all these beliefs and attitudes are at variance with reality, and the tendencies to which they give rise are based upon a misconception of the true state of affairs in general and of man's affairs in particular. For a time they may persist; indeed, there have been comparatively long periods in history, for example, in the Roman Empire of the second century or in eighteenth-century France, when events seemed to have conspired to suggest that the beliefs are true and that the ways of life which are based upon them can be permanently successful. During these periods existence at a high level of urbane and gracious living is enjoyed by those who are fortunate enough to have been born into a favoured social and economic class. Since, however, the beliefs are false and the structure of the universe and the status of human life are other than they affirm, these periods do not last. Sooner or later, the true facts of the situation assert themselves. There is a period of decline, confidence is lost and in the resultant chaos and confusion man finds himself confronting the non-human reality which, whatever name he chooses to apply to it, God, or the devil, or fate, or destiny, or the moral law, or the rhythm of the universe, now reveals itself as that to which he is and always has been subject.

The confrontation, since it has been effected by man's arrogance, is not agreeable, for the face of reality is revealed as hostile. The gods, as the Greeks would put it, are angry. Once again the battle of the gods and the Titans is fought out; once again the gods win, and man, who has presumed above his human stature, is cast down and through suffering made to realize his true nature. The thought of the great Greek dramatists is dominated by the same myth. In their tragic dramas and, indeed, throughout Greek thought the recurrent pattern of *hubris*, *nemesis*, and *até*, exhibits the workings of the same moral law. *Hubris* is the arrogance of man getting above himself and thinking he is lord of the universe; *até*, the disaster with which *nemesis* visits his presumption. Pride in our modern version, comes before a fall.

## STATEMENT

I believe that decadence is the name that we give to those periods of human history in which the workings of this moral machinery are revealed. There has been a long period of development; power has grown; man becomes puffed up with his success, forgets or ignores his true position in the universe, overreaches himself and offends the gods; the anger of the gods—I am still putting it, as the Greeks would have put it—is aroused by man's presumption, human affairs begin to decline and the decline may become a collapse. These are the periods of decadence, yet their seeds are sown in the preceding periods, the periods of human success and arrogance by which man, as the Greeks held, provokes the anger of the gods. These, then, are the periods of potential decadence.

In our own time we are passing from the first of these periods, the period of potential, into the second, the period of actual decadence.

Decadence, then, is a sign of man's tendency to misread his position in the universe, to take a view of his status and prospects more exalted than the facts warrant and to conduct his societies and to plan his future on the basis of this mis-reading. The mis-reading consists in a failure to acknowledge the non-human elements of value and deity to which the human is subject. Throughout the ensuing book I have called these elements 'the object'. Decadence, then, consists in a refusal to recognize 'the object'.



**PART I**  
**THE PRINCIPLES OF DECADENCE**



## CHAPTER I

### Introductory

# The Function of Philosophy in the Contemporary World

## *The Functions and Purposes of Philosophy as traditionally and as at present Conceived*

**B**ooks on philosophy, of which this is one, commonly contain, or used to contain, a discussion of the question, how far and in what respects should a philosophy seek to apply to life? By the phrase, 'applying to life', I understand to be meant the provision of such information about the nature and purpose of the universe as will help human beings to understand the one and enable them to further the other; will help and enable them, in other words, to live more efficient lives or, assuming that the understanding reveals the universe as moral, to live *better* lives. In short, that a philosophy should apply to life means that it should prescribe principles to live by and purposes to live for. In dissent from most contemporary thinking about philosophy I hold that this, the traditional view of the function and purpose of philosophy, is correct.

Some contemporary philosophers hold that the universe has no meaning; others that it may have, but that the human mind cannot discover it; others, again—and these range from the late Professor Collingwood to the fashionable contemporary school of logical positivists—that it can be discovered, but not by the method of philosophy. Hence, they maintain that instead of endeavouring to find out what the universe as a whole is like and to report to non-philosophers the results of their enquiry, philosophers should seek to lay bare the principles which are common



## INTRODUCTORY

to all the sciences, or to discover the pre-suppositions which underlie the beliefs which at a given moment in the history of a culture most people hold and which prompt the questions which most scientists are asking. Or philosophy, they suggest, should be content to analyse the meaning and to reveal the logical structure of sentences. . . .

It is further held that these revised functions of philosophy, these new tasks and purposes which are propounded for it, can be fulfilled only by developing and following a specialized technique. This technique is difficult, so difficult, indeed, that among those who use it philosophy has become a closed preserve, closed, that is to say, to all but initiates. As practised within this preserve, philosophical thinking is no longer an instrument by means of which men can liberate themselves from bondage to nature, from servitude to abstractions, from the tyranny of circumstance or the injustice of man; it is not even a torch to light up the dark places of the universe and so to reveal man's place and function within it. It shrinks into a technique for ensuring that, whenever philosophers try to use it for its traditional purposes, they will be trapped in the meshes of a net of verbal contradictions and so reduced to philosophical helplessness.

For my part, I hold that the universe has a meaning and that man's life has a special significance in relation to that meaning. I hold, further, that philosophy is a discipline—is, indeed, the chief of the *intellectual* disciplines—which if followed with intelligence and goodwill will enable us to divine something of the meaning and help us to assess at least some part of the significance. I hold, finally, that the method by which philosophy should proceed is that of straightforward thinking, thinking which can be performed by any person of reasonable intelligence and goodwill. I do not, that is to say, believe that philosophical thinking should proceed in accordance with a special set of rules devised for and appropriate to one particular technique, although it should be conducted according to the traditional laws of valid reasoning. I also hold that wherever possible it should avoid the use of technical terms.

I do not wish to suggest that philosophical thinking is, or ever

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

can be, easy, but it need not be made unnecessarily obscure. For obscurity may be of two kinds. There is the expression of obscurity and there is obscurity of expression. The first is pardonable; there is no reason—at least I know of none—why the universe should be readily intelligible to the mind of a twentieth-century Nordic adult; the second, which is the result of bad craftsmanship, is not. A man who seeks to express his thoughts on philosophy should study so to write that his meaning may be plain. Now, it seems to me that philosophers often make their subject more difficult than it need be. This is usually the effect of bad literary workmanship; not possessing by nature, they have not troubled to acquire by practice the art of writing clearly. Sometimes, however, they seem designedly to darken their meaning, seeking by a deliberate obfuscation of sense, or by the invention and use of an unnecessarily technical vocabulary, to deter outsiders from the mysteries to which they, the initiates, alone have the clue and so to increase the prestige of the initiates.

### *The Method of Philosophy*

In opposition to this view, I hold that the method of philosophy should be synopsis, clarification and synthesis. This, broadly, is the method prescribed by Aristotle at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He begins by pointing out that philosophy must take for its subject matter the thoughts, opinions, desires, feelings and experiences of men and women; for what other material can it have to work upon? Hence, the philosopher must first try to find out what men do, in fact, think and feel about the universe and about human life and the way in which it should be lived, and more especially what wise men think and good men feel. We must, he holds, collect as many such 'thoughts' as we can, sift them, compare them, collate them and so try to get a view of them as a whole. This is the work of synopsis.

Since most people are not systematic thinkers, systematic thought not being their business, many of the opinions we have collected will be found to be inconsistent with one another; others will appear relatively unimportant, others definitely misleading, since men often believe themselves to think what, on

## INTRODUCTORY

examination, it will be found they do not really think. Hence arises, secondly, the necessity of clarifying the different views which have been collected, of eliminating those which are self-contradictory, and of systematizing those which remain; that is to say, of arranging them under headings and in categories.

Thirdly, there is the task of putting together those opinions which after systematization are found to be consistent and which also appear *prima facie* to square with the known facts, so as to present a comprehensive and consistent body of opinion about man's life and the way in which it should be lived, or, if a number of such opinions or bodies of opinion emerge, of selecting those which seem to be the most plausible. This is the task of synthesis.

All these tasks fall within the sphere of the speculative intellect.

### *The Transition from Fact to Value*

But the work of philosophy does not end here. It includes, in my view, the performance of another function, a function which has traditionally been held to fall within the sphere of the practical intellect.

In summarizing Aristotle's account of the functions of philosophy, I have not hitherto travelled outside the realm of opinion. Philosophy, I have said, should sift, clarify and codify opinions, so that it may make plain for the benefit of all and sundry what it is that, purged of inconsistencies, people really do think. Having confined our attention hitherto to what people *do* think and like, we have still to effect the transition to what they *ought* to think and like; in other words, we have still to enter the realm of value.

According to many, perhaps most modern philosophers, philosophy should not try to enter this realm because there is no such realm to enter. Contemporary philosophical discussion is dominated by the claim of the logical positivists that it is the business of philosophy to show people what they really mean, by clearing away inconsistencies and eliminating ambiguities from their thought. They point out very properly that not only do we allow our thinking to be disturbed and distorted by our emotions—the familiar case of rationalization; but that we also deceive

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

ourselves as to what it is that we think by the misleading way in which we express our thoughts. 'Germany declares war,' we say, and it looks as if what we are saying is of the same order as 'Hitler declares war', since it is couched in the same logical form. And so we make the mistake of supposing that Germany is the name of an entity just as Hitler is the name of an entity and conclude that States are entities which have real being. Similarly, the phrase 'humanity is self-seeking' is of the same logical form as the phrase 'Jones is self-seeking'. And so we fall into the error of supposing that there is an entity, humanity, which is of the same order of being as Jones. Thus, in a hundred ways we allow ourselves to be misled by logical and syntactical forms of expression into the error of endowing with substantive existence entities such as States and universals which, in fact, have no substantive existence.

These and similar errors logical positivists claim to have exposed by their analysis of the meaning and structure of language and few would deny that their claim is well founded. Indeed, in this sphere an admirable job of clearing and cleaning has been done.

But here the good work has stopped. Emboldened by their successful use of the surgeon's knife upon the excrescences, positivists have proceeded to cut away healthy tissue and to present us with a theory of knowledge which denies substantive existence not only to unreal entities such as States, but also to the traditional objects of human aspiration and pursuit such as values and ideals. Dominated by an extreme empiricism which demands of every meaningful statement that it should be verifiable by experience conceived in sensory terms, they proceed to point out that judged by this standard values and ideals are without meaning and, therefore, without existence.

Now, if we deny value, deny, that is to say, that the universe includes a realm of principles or values which may be manifested and even embodied in the familiar world, but which are other than and independent of that world, we are, it is obvious, precluded from making what I have called the transition from the world of opinion to the world of value. For the transition from 'this is what men think and like' to 'this is what men *ought* to think and like' depends upon the admission of the existence of things which are intrinsically proper for thinking and liking; proper for thinking

## INTRODUCTORY

because they are true, proper for liking because they are good or beautiful. In short, the introduction of the concept of 'ought' depends, I hold, upon the admission of the existence of a real world containing values such as truth, goodness and beauty.

### *The Presupposition of Moral Philosophy*

Is the transition justifiable? The question is not one that can be pursued in this introductory chapter. Much of the ensuing book is, indeed, an attempt to answer it, to answer it in the affirmative. For the present, I must be content to beg it, pointing out in doing so that an important transition, the transition from fact to value, is, indeed, involved.

I venture, however, to make here two subsidiary points. First, the conception of philosophy indicated above, according to which, philosophy should seek to provide principles to live by and purposes to live for does presuppose the existence of objective value. For its presupposition is that in the realm traditionally assigned to metaphysics and morals there is something objective to be known and that those who have been adequately trained in the requisite technique, trained to think clearly and systematically, may come to know it better than others. This belief in its practical application entails that there is such a thing as knowledge of right living and that the philosopher, by reason of the fact that this knowledge is his concern, should be in a position to give advice to others. Hence, the possibility of such practical application also stands or falls with the acceptance of the existence of an objective world of principles and values.

For what the philosopher, in my view, ought to be in a position to say is not only, (i) when cleared of inconsistency and ambiguity this, I find, turns out to be the real opinion of most people as to what is valuable; but (ii) as the result of reflection upon the opinions held by many men and more particularly upon those of the great philosophers, reflection which may and, I hope, has led me to some independent thinking of my own, I feel myself in a position to say that these are the opinions that people *ought* to hold as to what is valuable.

In other words, the philosopher's task does not end with sifting,

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

purging and clarifying the opinions of others; it includes the provision of reasoned arguments as to what should be their opinions. It is not enough to point the road along which people have travelled and do travel; the philosopher should also seek to indicate the road along which they ought to travel, precisely because some roads are better than others.

### *Insight and the Practical Intellect*

Secondly, this wider function that I am postulating for philosophy has been traditionally assigned to what has been called the practical intellect. Traditionally—and I am here still following what I take to be the dominant tradition in Western philosophy—the speculative intellect has been allotted the task of obtaining a comprehensive view of human life and of the universe in which it is lived; the practical intellect has sought to set forth, in the light of this view, the ends which men ought to value, the purposes which they ought to pursue and the principles by which they ought to live, as well as to indicate the means by which they may attain the rightly valued ends, further the rightly conceived purposes, cleave to the rightly prescribed principles. In a word, it is the task of the practical intellect both to prescribe the good life and to indicate by what methods it may be lived.

Now this task passes over into, or rather it culminates in, an act of insight. Questions of value are not in the last resort susceptible of settlement by argument. Argument is reason's sphere. Now reasons can be given why so and so should be deemed valuable, and why such and such a way of life should be regarded as right and pursued because it is right, reasons which are derived from that study and systematization of men's opinions as to the status of human life and of the nature of the universe in which it is lived which I have been prescribing as the work of the speculative intellect. But if the reasons are not accepted, or if, though they are accepted, the conclusions which are based upon them are not conceded to follow, reason can do no more. 'This,' it can say, 'is the evidence upon which I ask you to make your decision; these are the reasons I adduce in favour of this decision

## INTRODUCTORY

rather than that. But the decision is, after all, yours. If you refuse to make a decision at all, or if you make a wrong decision, I have nothing more to say.' Now the decision itself is the work of insight. Either we *see* the things to be valuable and the way of life right, or we do not. If we do not, then there is no more to be said, except perhaps that we lack that insight into the nature of good which is proper to human beings.

The foregoing interprets, as I understand it, the teaching of Aristotle as to the function of philosophy in general and of ethical philosophy in particular. For in respect of three at least of the cardinal points in Aristotle's system of ethics, the definition of a good character, the doctrine of the 'mean' and the recognition of the superior worth of the life of the contemplative intellect, the judgement which Aristotle passes and asks his readers to pass is in the last resort one of direct insight.

The performance by philosophy of its traditional function as prescribed by Aristotle is, I think, of special importance at the present time and for three reasons.

### *The Effects of Science*

First, while all societies have made professions which are at variance with their practices, in our own the disparity is specially marked. This is largely owing to the pre-eminence of science. Science is the architect of the modern world; it also forms the climate of men's minds. The views consciously entertained by most contemporary human beings in the Western world about the nature of man's life and of the universe in which it is lived bear upon them the impress of the physical sciences which have shaped them. In practice science has given men an unprecedented power of fulfilling their purposes and realizing their ends. In brief, it has given a mastery of means. Science is, however, incapable of prescribing ends; it cannot, that is to say, determine what things ought to be pursued because they are good, or beautiful, or true, or because they are valuable in themselves. Nor can it prescribe how life ought to be lived. Thus, though science gives a mastery of means, it cannot tell us for what purposes the means should be employed. Science, then, is ethically neutral; it enables

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

men to satisfy their desires and to further their purposes; if their desires are on the whole good and make for human welfare, this added power of satisfaction, this increased ability to further, is correspondingly good. If they are bad and make for human misery, then the added powers of satisfaction and furtherance that science bestows are correspondingly harmful. Science, then, does not tell us what desires ought to be encouraged, what things are valuable, what ends should be pursued or what purposes furthered.

Nevertheless, it is clear that we need this knowledge of ends, purposes and values, since if we lack it we are, says Aristotle, like archers who shoot without knowing where or what is the target. We must, he says, if we are to live successfully, be clear what our ends are, what is the mark for our arrows and whither our actions tend. If we have not clearly defined our ends, we tend to live random lives. This, Aristotle points out, is true of societies no less than of individuals.

### *Responsibility of Science*

To whom, then, are we to turn for information in regard to ends? To the scientists? But they disclaim responsibility. 'Scientists,' said Lord Rayleigh, in his Presidential Address to the 1938 meeting of the British Association, 'are impelled by the spirit of scientific curiosity, with no possibility of telling whether their work would prove them to be fiends or dreamers or angels and they cannot be deterred by possible contingent results. . . . Scientists work,' he went on, 'for one purpose only: to acquire knowledge. Mustard gas is quite unexpectedly applied to war, and the production of it is held by the critics to be the work not of dreamers but of fiends whose activities ought to be suppressed.'

Addressing the annual general meeting of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee of the House of Commons early in the war, Dr. A. V. Hill made a further point. 'I should be the last to claim,' he said, 'that we scientific men, as a class, are less liable to prejudice on grounds of self-interest, race, politics and religion than other educated people; and we should deceive ourselves and, perhaps, some uncritical members of the public,



## INTRODUCTORY

if we were to assume (as some of us seem to do) that scientific eminence, or the scientific habit of mind, as such, or even scientific notoriety, give any special virtue to our opinions on more ordinary topics.'

Lord Rayleigh is saying that scientists are not responsible for prescribing the ends to which society applies the results of their work; Dr. Hill adds that they are not competent to do so. I am, of course, aware that many scientists repudiate these limitations of their field of legitimate interest and hold that they ought to take upon themselves the burden of the responsibility for the use which society makes of their work. Some go further and claim that science and, they sometimes seem to imply, science alone should direct society. In so far as this claim is based upon any presumed competence in political and social matters which a training in science is supposed to confer, it is, I submit, baseless. Scientists have just as much and just as little responsibility as other citizens for the ends which society seeks and the purposes it pursues, and they have no more competence than other citizens to determine these ends and purposes; indeed, if we are to judge from the utterances of the scientist-publicists who, while sedulously abjuring any absolute basis for morality, treat society to moral lectures on salvation by science and pose as the saviours of the civilization which they are helping so rapidly to destroy, their competence in this department is certainly not greater than that of the theologians, moralists, humanists, philosophers and even politicians, whom they deride. Nor, having regard to the necessary limitations of their education and the narrowness of their training, should the fact cause surprise.

✓ Scientists, then, in my view, do right to disclaim responsibility. The man who invents the explosive is no more responsible for the destruction it causes than the girl who fills the shell, or the gunner who fires it. Scientists, in fact, are as much to blame as the rest of us for society's plight, as much and no more.

### *The Duty of Philosophy*

It is because their concern is with means rather than with ends that the scientists are right to abjure a position which they are

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

clearly unfitted to fill. Yet while our mastery of means grows apace, our knowledge of ends remains stationary or even diminishes. It is probable that men today know less of the art of life, its values, its duties and its pleasures, than the average male citizen of Renaissance Italy or of fifth-century B.C. Athens. Yet almost all of us are today educated to the point of being able to read. Hence arises, as it seems to me, a challenge to essay the task which philosophy has traditionally tried to perform, that of giving such information and guidance as the wisdom of the past may have to offer as to the meaning of life and the way it should be lived. This function contemporary philosophers largely disavow. They accept no duty of trying to enlighten the mind, to guide the opinions or correct the values of the public. Rather, confronted by the stresses of our time, they withdraw from the vulgarity of contacts which would, they feel, cheapen themselves and their work. The results of this withdrawal I venture to put in the words of the late Professor Collingwood:

‘Since one must not seek it from thinkers or from ideals or from principles, one must look (for guidance) to people who were not thinkers (but fools), to processes that were not thinking (but passion), to aims that were not ideals (but caprices), and to rules that were not principles (but rules of expediency). If philosophers had wanted to train up a generation of Englishmen and Englishwomen expressly as the potential dupes of every adventurer in morals or politics, commerce or religion who should appeal to their emotions and promise them private gains which he neither could procure them nor even meant to procure them, no better way of doing it could have been discovered.’

### *The Lack of Creed and Code*

A second reason for the special need of philosophy in our time is in part derived from the first. For the gulf between theory and practice, between ends and means, which science has accentuated is far from being the only reason for the metaphysical and moral agnosticism of the age. A second is to be found in the fact that for the first time in the history of civilized man most people grow to maturity without a creed to focus their aspirations or a code

## INTRODUCTORY

to guide their steps. Millions today hold no belief of any kind either about the way in which the universe is ordered, or about the way in which life ought to be lived. For the lack of a creed is only too often responsible for the abandonment of a code. A large part of morality has in all ages sprung from a desire to please God, a desire which the prospect of the respective consequences of His pleasure and displeasure, consequences which most religions have painted in the liveliest colours, has done much to intensify. When heavenly rewards and hellish punishments are no longer operative to attract and to deter, the incentive to observe the traditional restraints is correspondingly diminished. A number of other factors contribute to the same result, of which the most important is the international situation. The nightmare fear of war has for years operated like a shutter cutting off the prospect of the future and investing with a remote and somewhat academic air the injunction to adopt what may be described as a long-term attitude to life with all that it implies in the way of discipline and training in the present in the interests of character-building for the future. The fear of the atomic bomb and of what it holds in store for our civilization takes pride of place in any estimate of prospects for the future. 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow the atomic bomb falls,' is an understandable creed in a situation in which to postpone the fruition of the more obvious desires seems tantamount to forgoing them altogether.

The more intellectually sophisticated embrace a miscellany of different creeds and cults, turning from one to another with the changing waves of intellectual fashion. Reflecting upon the contemporary scene one is impressed with the terrifying topicality of Plato's picture of the democratic man in the eighth book of the Republic<sup>1</sup>.

Plato proceeds to point out that sooner or later the democratic way of life is found unsatisfying. Sooner or later a single tyrant desire will dominate the others, or men will submit themselves to the tyranny of an external authority in order to escape the tyranny of their own passions. This has already happened on the continent of Europe. In England young people have for years past been accumulating a fund of unexpended seriousness which only

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iv, p. 103.

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

awaits a suitable channel through which to pour. It is in the existence in all the countries of Western civilization of masses of disillusioned young men with energies untapped, minds unextended, and loyalties unawakened that lie civilization's danger and the philosopher's opportunity. It was a precisely similar opportunity that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were anxious to seize, holding it to be part of the function of philosophy both to prescribe ends for conduct and rules for their attainment. Plato, in particular, sought to make the Academy a school of political planning from which statesmen and legislators might issue to put into practice for the guidance of mankind the lessons which philosophy had taught. No parallel anxiety is shown, no parallel endeavour made by contemporary philosophers.

The predicament of the contemporary individual is largely reflected in that of his society. For it, too, lacks any agreed assurance as to the ends to which its overwhelmingly powerful means should be directed. In so far as it entertains any conscious doctrine of ends, it tends to identify them with the maximum production and equal distribution of commodities. The mastery of matter places in our hands unprecedented powers of destruction, yet we show ourselves no wiser than our predecessors in regard to the use we make of them. Hence, it is not sufficient to show that those who direct our societies are not morally worse or intellectually more stupid than the rulers and statesmen of the past; nor, indeed, are they. It is necessary to point to the obligation which is laid upon them to be better and wiser, precisely because the powers they wield are greater. Hence arises a third challenge to philosophy to perform its traditional function by indicating ends and prescribing values. If the philosopher assures us in his modesty that he has no wisdom of his own to offer, he should at least remember that he is the official repository of the philosophical wisdom of the past and that it is his duty to transmit and interpret it for the guidance of a distracted present.

### *What Philosophy Might Do*

I emphasize the words 'the philosophical wisdom of the past' because they enable me to disclaim the suggestion that I have any

## INTRODUCTORY

of my own to offer. I am not proposing in this book to lay bare some new revelation, for none has been vouchsafed to me. Nor do I claim a wisdom superior to that of scientists or of men of affairs. I claim only to have some acquaintance with the thought both of Greece and Christianity which constitute at once the main sources and the dominant strands of the intellectual tradition of Western Europe. I think that we neglect this tradition at our peril. It is the tradition of a liberal and humane civilization which values personal freedom and is willing, at least in theory, to treat the individual as an end in himself and not merely as a means to ends other than his own. For the past fifty years the soul of liberal civilization in Europe has been dying and with the decay of the informing spirit, the body also has begun to collapse. Unless the spirit can be restored to it, the civilization of Europe will fall. Either it will succumb to the social and political chaos resulting from years of internecine warfare or it will be borne down by alien traditions deriving from different sources.

I think that the threat from the totalitarian States, when seen in its true perspective, may well reveal itself as the contemporary version of the secular pattern of history, whereby the barbarians break into and disrupt older and by comparison effete civilizations. The threat offered by the Nazis has been successfully averted, but it still exists in a different form in the growing power of totalitarian Russia. It is in this situation that, as I conceive, the philosopher is called upon to perform what I have called his traditional function and to interpret in the light of the Graeco-Christian tradition the accumulating factual knowledge of the twentieth century which is at once so bewildering and so unassimilable.

More precisely, it is assimilated in bits since those who have mastered one department of it are increasingly ignorant of what lies outside their special sphere. I have devoted a late chapter in the ensuing book to a study of the growing departmentalization of knowledge and its consequences.<sup>1</sup> I deduce that one of the needs of our time is the need for synopsis followed by synthesis on the part of those who, because they have viewed synoptically, have viewed also in perspective. It is only in the light of a perspective that the relative values of different ends can be graded and

<sup>1</sup>See chapter xiv, pp. 360-8.

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

assessed. If the perspective is provided by the synoptic view, the assessment should be in terms of the scale of values established by the Graeco-Christian tradition and embodied in the *philosophia perennis* which, beginning with Plato and continuing through Plotinus, comes down to us through the scholastic philosophers of the early Christian centuries, forms part of the Catholic philosophy of the Christian Church, was reaffirmed in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the Cambridge Platonists and which, though except by Catholics comparatively neglected today, may still rank as the dominant tradition in our philosophy.

The task of the philosopher is, then, I conceive, first to endeavour to see as a whole and so to obtain a perspective for valuation; then, in the light of his concept of values, to grade and assess; thirdly, to make plain his results for the benefit of others, seeking both to present his perspective and to convey the valuations which he has made within it. This, the work of the *vulgarisateur*—there is no exact English equivalent for the man who spreads with clarity, vividness, force and accuracy, the knowledge obtained by and the wisdom derived from others—seems to me to be the work which philosophers are particularly fitted by their training and tradition to undertake. This precisely was the task which, over four centuries ago, Erasmus set himself to perform in a time of similar chaos at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Himself a learned man, he was one of the first to set the task of communicating knowledge above that of increasing it. As H. A. L. Fisher says of him in his *History of Europe*: he was ‘a citizen of the world, interested in conduct above all things, and quite as much concerned with popularizing knowledge as with extending it’. And the knowledge which he sought to popularize was precisely that tradition of classical and Christian culture which was then and which is still the common possession of Western and Central Europe and of which the world today stands desperately in need.

Erasmus’s primary concerns were that the Scriptures should be translated into every language and that the teachings both of Plato and of Christ be disinterred from the deposits of centuries of theological and academic disputation under which they had been buried. A similar task has been undertaken in our own time by

## INTRODUCTORY

H. G. Wells who has done more than any other of his contemporaries to educate adult men and women. While his main concern has been the elucidation of the relation of science to human affairs, he has also in his *Outline of History* provided a perspective within which the course of those affairs can be viewed as a whole. Thus, instead of seeing history as a number of little lighted patches environed by an enormous darkness, many of us were for the first time enabled to survey man's past as a continuous process. I believe that a similar task awaits philosophy today; I do not, of course, mean that I think this to be its only task, but I think that it is an important one and that it is not performed.

The Adult Education movement performs something of this office for those whose education has been cut short at fourteen and, taking all knowledge for its province, seeks to make working men and women free of the cultural inheritance of our civilization and to acquaint them with what great men have thought and said memorably about life. But for the so-called educated no provision of a similar kind is made.

At the Universities diminishing numbers pursue the humane studies, while oppressed by the growing departmentalization of knowledge, scientists, administrators and executives have no time to travel outside the spheres of the specialized techniques in which they are instructed. As a result, they go through life without that perspective of principle and value in the light of which educated men have in the past sought to regulate conduct and view the universe. Immersed in the studies of their special departments, they simply do not know what the great philosophers and teachers of mankind have said about man's life and how it should be lived, or about man's communities and how they should be run. I do not wish to suggest that civilization depends upon men's willingness to devote at least a proportion of their time to making themselves acquainted with and pondering upon the wisdom which men have distilled through the long centuries from monasteries and cells, from libraries and studies, even from habitations in the desert; yet, one is sometimes tempted to think, our civilization cannot survive in its continued absence. It is from these considerations that the need for the *vulgarisateur* arises.

It is often objected to his synoptic productions that they err

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

in point of fact or detail. When, for example, Mr. Wells wrote his celebrated work, *An Outline of History*, ranks of embattled historians rose to accuse him of faults of perpetration and of omission in regard to those tiny periods of man's past which they had severally subjected to microscopic investigation. Yet it is open to question whether Wells did not do a greater service to his generation than all his critics added together.

I do not know that the case for the *vulgarisateur* can be stated better than the late Lord Tweedsmuir stated it in his autobiography, *Memory-Hold-The-Door*: 'Lord Rutherford used to say that no conclusion which he ever reached was of any use to him until he could put it into plain English, into language understood by the ordinary man. Attempts to present the history of the world as an interrelated intelligible process, or to give a bird's-eye view of the long march of the sciences, may be faulty in detail, with many arbitrary judgements, but they do furnish principles of interpretation which enable the reader to find at any rate *one* way in the world of thought—perhaps a little later to make his *own* way. In this task the *vulgarisateur* may be preparing the soil for a rich future harvest, just as the work of the Sophists cleared the ground for Plato.'

### *Contemporary Scepticism as to Reason*

The question may be asked, to what end should this office which I am prescribing for philosophy be performed? Many would think it sufficient to reply that philosophy springs from the impulse of curiosity; that it is natural to man to wish to know what the universe is like and that, whether or no it succeeds, the attempt to satisfy his curiosity is an end in itself. I agree with this view, but the answer in so far as it is valid, is valid in all times and I am here suggesting that there is a special need of philosophy in our time. The answer which is most pertinent to my theme is to be found in the conviction, at once widely, indeed almost universally, held, but now by many abandoned, that thought affects action. The contemporary abandonment of this conviction is due to a number of factors which can here be only very briefly referred to. I might mention, however, in addition to the



## INTRODUCTORY

philosophical scepticism which denies that the human mind can by thinking discover true knowledge about the universe, the psychological scepticism which denies that thought can ever be free, free, that is to say, to reach conclusions about what is good or right or true or beautiful, unbiased by non-rational factors. Reason, it is intimated by those who take this view, is a cork bobbing about on the waves of unconscious trends and urges, its movements being determined by currents that run below the surface. Reason is thus represented as the handmaid of instinct and desire, her function being to invent arguments for what we instinctively want to believe and justifications for what we instinctively want to do, so that a man's thought follows his desires much as the feet of a hungry dog follow his nose. Now wishes find expression in action; if, then, thought reflects but does not determine our wishes, it is clear that thought plays little or no part in shaping our actions. The influence of Marxist theory tends in the same direction, tends, that is to say, to impugn the independence and validity of reason.

I have given a critical account of these views in a subsequent chapter.<sup>1</sup> For the present, I must record, without giving reasons for, my disagreement. The tendency they represent contributes, it is obvious, to widen the gulf between theory and practice to which I have already referred; for if you do not believe that by thinking you can alter practice, it is clear that you will not think about practice, there being no point in taking thought for what you do, if you believe that you will do it whether you take thought or no, or, more precisely, that both the thought and the action are twin products of the same fundamental, non-rational impulses.

### *The Power of Thought*

Now, in opposition to this view, I believe in the practical efficacy of the intellect; I believe, that is to say, that what you think affects and may determine what you do. It follows that facts are not 'hard', since they can be affected by thinking about them. If you can change men's moral and political ideas, you can, I hold, thereby change society; if you can change their ideas about

<sup>1</sup>See chapter ix.

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

what is worth while, you can change their mode of living. It seems to me to be nonsense to suggest that the ideas which lay behind the French Revolution played no part in determining its outbreak or guiding its course, or that the ideas of Christ or Mahomet about how men should live have played no part in changing their modes of living. In no sphere, perhaps, does the student find more impressive verification of the power of the idea not only to persist but in the end to prevail than in the victory which the claim to think freely gained over dogmatic religion. To trace the slow history of French free thought from the new springs of Renaissance discovery through Rabelais and Montaigne, thence to the Libertins and Bayle and from them to its full flowering in Holbach and Diderot and Voltaire, is to realize the power over men's minds of ideas that are rooted in objective fact. (Yet the phrase 'rooted in objective fact' is, I think, merely a periphrasis for the word 'true'.) On the one side was all that authority could muster to suppress and destroy with the weapons of exile, imprisonment, torture and death; on the other, there was only the power of the idea. Yet in the last resort the idea prevailed, though only for a time, for the victories of the mind and spirit have to be won afresh in every age.

Nor are the changes which thought brings about negligible; on occasion they have profoundly affected man's way of living, and affected it for the better; indeed, it is the hope of bettering man's life and his societies that has inspired almost every system of philosophy which has concerned itself with human conduct and institutions. Most of us are at some time or other impelled, even if the impulse is brief, to take a hand in solving the problems of our society, and most of us know in our hearts that it is our business to try to leave the world a little better than we found it.

'There are no phenomena,' says Herbert Spencer, 'which a society presents but what have their origins in the phenomena of individual human life.' This, I think, is true. To change men's lives is to change society, and to change their minds is to change their lives. Now, it is by ideas that men's minds are changed.

Such have been the presuppositions of most of the great thinkers and great reformers of our own country. For my part,

## INTRODUCTORY

I share them. I hold that if a philosophy is true, then its application cannot make the world worse and may make it better. I hold with Plato and Aristotle that theory and practice are so intimately connected that to believe something which is true cannot but affect a man's conduct for the better, and that, if many men so believe, the fact cannot but affect their society for the better. At the least and the lowest it is not unreasonable to try to improve things by thinking about them. Such, I think, has been the dominating tradition in philosophy; such the teaching of the *philosophia perennis* which comes down to us through Christianity from the Greeks.

Holding these views, I think that the problems with which philosophy should concern itself should, at least in part, be drawn from the life of contemporary society and that the conclusions which philosophy reaches should be such as apply to that society. I hold, in short, that the philosopher should seek to give help and guidance to the world in which he lives and, I repeat, if he has no wisdom of his own to offer, he should at least endeavour to make plain for a spiritually rootless and intellectually guideless generation some part of the wisdom of the past.

### *Philosophy and Science*

To this high claim for philosophy many will, no doubt, demur. Philosophy is ill-spoken of, when it is spoken of at all, in the contemporary world, and is assailed from many quarters. Upon the attack that springs from within philosophy itself, which takes the form of asserting that if there is an objective world other than the world of events in space-time, philosophy can give us no information about it, since statements as to its nature are strictly meaningless—upon this attack which bears some likeness to what in other connections is known as '*la trahison des clercs*', I have already made some comments. But of the criticisms which are currently made by non-philosophers I have hitherto said little. Two may be specially mentioned.

The first is that philosophy has, in fact, no knowledge to offer, in which respect it is contrasted unfavourably with science. Science, it is pointed out, provides us with a steadily increasing

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

and developing body of verifiable knowledge; philosophy resembles nothing so much as a series of marches and counter marches which each philosopher begins by endeavouring to discredit the results of his predecessors.

The answer to this criticism is not, I think, difficult to perceive. If, as I believe, philosophy is largely concerned with an objective and changeless world of value and with the manner of its intrusion into the familiar world which we know by means of our senses, then the objects of philosophy are, as Plato maintained, eternal.

If this is so, it is not unreasonable to expect that the accounts which men have sought to give of them will bear something of the timeless character of their objects. The world of "eternality" is always present to men's minds and there is no reason why the twentieth century A.D. should enjoy a deeper insight into its nature than the fourth century B.C. Hence it is unreasonable to expect progress in philosophy, if progress is taken to mean the accumulation of a developing body of ascertained and verifiable knowledge. It is for this reason that philosophical theories which embody an insight into the nature of the real world are always topical precisely because they are never outmoded, whereas early scientific theories can be shown to be untrue and are studied merely for their historical interest.

### *Philosophy and Bad Philosophy*

This does not mean that all philosophical theories are of equal value or that the influence of some of them may not be bad. There can be false insight as well as true; evil counsellors as well as good. This brings me to the second charge as to which a brief word must be said. This is the charge that, so far from giving us a knowledge of how to live well, philosophy, as taught by some philosophers, has militated against the good life. I think that this is true, but true only if it be admitted that there *are* principles, goals, purposes and values which philosophy seeks to interpret and to make plain. For if it be possible to interpret and to make plain, it must also be possible to misinterpret and to darken. Some philosophical doctrines, I should say, have had precisely this effect; for example, that of the Sophists with whom Socrates

## INTRODUCTORY

contended, that of the Cynics, the hedonist philosophy of Aristippus, the Absolutist philosophy of Hobbes and, I should venture to add, the Idealist philosophy of the Hegelian Dialectic in some at least of its aspects.

To this charge also the answer is, I suggest, not difficult. The cure for bad philosophy is not no philosophy but better philosophy, and the practical influence of philosophy is no more to be discredited or declared to be non-existent because some philosophers have been mistaken and the consequences of their doctrines bad, than democracy is to be denounced because some men are demagogues, drinking because some men get drunk or swimming because some men drown.

Yet—I venture again to emphasize the point—to admit that some philosophies may be false and the knowledge which they purport to give harmful, is to concede by implication that it means something to say of a philosophy that it is true and of its effects that may be beneficial by increasing our knowledge of how to live well.

So much for the common charges against philosophy. If it be granted that philosophy has in spite of them an important office to perform, I proceed to enquire what are the qualifications which a philosopher should possess if he is to play his part in its performance.

### *The Philosopher as Man of the World*

In order to perform the office I have postulated for philosophy, the philosopher must not be content to be merely a philosopher; he must be also a man of the world, since, if I am right, the sphere of his legitimate interest includes not only the non-human universe but the world of men, more particularly in its relation to the non-human universe. Now it is a good rule—one of the many formulated by Aristotle—that if in any sphere you are to study to good effect, you must have practical experience of the subject matter which you take as your field of study. Why, he asks, is it that though you may teach a child languages and grammar and music and arithmetic to good effect, you cannot give him an understanding of history; he may find it easy to remember the dates and names

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

and battles of history, but he will not grasp its import or learn its lessons. Why, though we take it for granted that he may learn physics and chemistry at an early age, do we instinctively recognize that politics will be beyond him? Why, though he may do well at mathematics, do we hold him back from philosophy? Because grammar and music and languages and physics and mathematics do not 'have to do with' human beings, and it is not necessary, therefore, to have had intercourse with men and affairs to come to right conclusions in regard to them. History and politics and philosophy, on the other hand, are in a large measure about men, about their relations to each other, about the principles of their association, about the lives they live and the lives they ought to live. Hence, to read with understanding what others have written on these subjects, so that what one reads may fertilize the mind and bear fruit in good counsel and sound judgement, one must have had intercourse with men, watched and participated in their forms of association, co-operated in their activities, listened to their professions, observed their practices and observed, too, how the former differ from the latter. All this means that the philosopher, to be a good philosopher, must have lived for some time the life of the world; it means that he will write with more understanding about politics if, like Aristotle, he has been able to study at first hand the workings of limited monarchy and tutored the son of an absolute ruler; about the individual and his relation to society, if, like Locke, he has practised as a doctor and discharged public business; about man and his relation to God, if, like Pascal, or St. Augustine, he has heard the confessions of sinners and enjoyed religious experience. In general, we may say that to have a wide understanding of life and to pronounce upon it with authority, a man must have touched it at many points.

Hence the philosopher should not aspire after the ideal of the unworldly, absentminded simpleton of popular tradition; he should be of the world, worldly, at least to the extent of learning what the ways of the world are and dealing with it after its own fashion. So much for the philosopher in his public capacity.

In his private, the obligation to learn what are the ways of the world demands that he include among his qualifications not less than the average portion of human experience and

## INTRODUCTORY

suffering—not too much, for that might warp or embitter his nature, but enough to know what Virgil meant when he said, ‘*Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*’; to know, in fact, that life is tragic. Most contemporary philosophers appear to me to lack this experience. They have loved tepidly, or not at all; they have been drunk rarely, sometimes never; they have not often been browbeaten and still less often have they been imprisoned or tortured; they have hardly ever been starved and they do not know what it is like to bring up a family of children in a three-roomed house on twenty-five shillings a week. I think that their insight into life would be greater if their lives had been imbued with some tincture of these experiences. Kant, for example, reared the formidable edifice of his moral theory on the most exiguous foundation of moral experience. He never, we are told, could quite determine how many sweet cakes he ought to have for his tea. As he grew older and fatter, he knew that he wanted more than were good for him; he struggled against the temptation, sometimes yielding, sometimes triumphing; but this, so far as we know, was his most outstanding moral experience. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Kant, though a great philosopher, is less great than Plato.

### *The Philosopher in Troubled Times*

Yet perhaps I am unfair to Kant who, Germany having settled down after the turmoil of the Thirty Years, spent the last fifty years of his life in the city of Königsberg; for the ivory tower may do well enough as a dwelling for the philosopher in quiet times. But in times of change and trouble when accepted principles are questioned and traditional creeds abandoned, it is by following the example of Socrates who mixed with all men, questioning them and answering their questions in the market place, or of Plato who accepted as an obligation the education of an absolute ruler, that the philosopher will serve mankind and best serve philosophy.

Plato has a significant passage on what he calls the persistence of habit without principle—‘philosophy’ is the word he actually uses. He points out that ways of life originally embraced on

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

principle may become so habitual that they persist by their own momentum, when the principles on which they were originally based have been abandoned or forgotten. At least they may so persist in quiet times, but in periods of strain and crisis the habitual way of life, lacking any foundation in principle, crumbles and finally collapses. This, I think, is what is happening in our time. The inheritors of a religious tradition, we live in an age which is to all intents and purposes without religious belief. For a time the ethical principles for which Christianity provided an other-worldly backing survived and agnostics and rationalists continued to live exemplary lives. But in the years which succeeded the first world war the principles which had restrained some Victorians from the more obvious forms of self-indulgence and self-aggrandisement were falling everywhere into desuetude, with the result that, when the next war came, deprived of their metaphysical foundations, they were repudiated together with the view of the universe in which they had been grounded. If in such a period the philosopher is to do what I conceive to be his duty, he must try to indicate that basis of moral principle, to present in fact that 'philosophy', without which moral practice goes by the board. He must, then, once again consider and pronounce upon the time-honoured questions of the good life for man and for society. But to do this fruitfully, he must also, if I am right, be in and of society.

### *Philosophers and Kings*

I am not here suggesting that philosophers should be politicians, still less that they should be kings. But those who quote so familiarly and so often Plato's famous remark seem often to be unaware of its sequel. 'Unless,' they quote, 'philosophers bear kingly rule in cities, or those who are now called kings and princes, become genuine and adequate philosophers . . .' But they should read further, when they will find, 'unless the numerous natures who at present pursue either politics or philosophy, the one to the exclusion of the other, be forcibly debarred from this behaviour, there will be no respite from evil my dear Glaucon, for cities nor, I fancy, for humanity.'



## INTRODUCTORY

In thus pleading for a union of philosophy and politics, Plato is condemning specialization in either. In effect, he is saying two things : first, that politicians should have some knowledge of philosophy ; secondly, that philosophers should not hold themselves aloof from politics. In other words, whatever may be their duty in quiet times, a clear obligation is laid upon philosophers in times of trouble to concern themselves with the problems of society. And what form can their concern take, if it be not to make plain for the man in the street the wisdom that philosophy should have taught them, that he may have principles to live by and values to live for?

### *Influence of Philosophers in the Recent Past*

These views are held by few contemporary philosophers. Not only have most discontinued the practice of the traditional function of philosophy ; they abjure the theory which prescribes it. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they abjure it partly because they are unfitted to perform it. For, to perform it, a man must, if Aristotle is right, have enough experience of the world of affairs to afford material for his philosophizing. In other words, if he is to illuminate current problems with the light of a wisdom from which the many are debarred both by their education and by their immersion in the practical and the topical, he must have some knowledge of the practical and the topical. That he must know something of philosophy goes, of course, without saying and, I should like to add, he must not only know but care. Now, if a man is to care for philosophy, he must first believe in it, believe, that is to say, that the human mind can by thinking find out some part of the truth regarding this puzzling universe in which we live. Philosophy springs, Aristotle tells us, originally from the impulse of curiosity and the first requisite of the philosopher who is to make philosophy fruitful is that he should care passionately to know what the universe is like. He must feel that the endeavour to find out is the highest and most exciting adventure of the human spirit and he must have the power to communicate his excitement to others ; for the end of philosophy, Aristotle also taught, is not only right understanding but right

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

action. Hence, an infusion of reverence will do no harm. That the philosopher should be able to say with Keats, 'I have loved the principle of beauty in all things and the memory of great men' will stand him in good stead as a philosopher.

Now, both these conditions, the condition that the philosopher should believe in and care for philosophy and the condition that he should know something of practical affairs, have been satisfied in this country in the recent past. The relevance of both was, for example, implicitly accepted as recently as the nineteenth century, particularly at Oxford and at the Scottish Universities.

Oxford and Scottish philosophers did not disdain to concern themselves with contemporary affairs. Nor was their concern confined to a purely academic interest. It expressed itself in a practical influence which, on occasion, deflected the course of events. A long list of distinguished names, beginning with those of Locke and Hume in the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth running from Bentham, and John Stuart Mill to Jowett and Caird and T. H. Green bears witness to the fruitful marriage of philosophy with affairs. For these men were not only outstanding as philosophers, they were public men whose participation in the life of the nation was continuous and distinguished, and who brought to bear upon contemporary events considerations derived from a larger perspective than that in which the mind of the practical man is accustomed to move. These men loomed large in the eyes of the world. They were public figures and men knew them.

### *Reputation and Status of Contemporary Philosophers*

What names of parallel report has philosophy to offer today? Of the three living English philosophers who are likely to be mentioned in future text books on philosophy, Russell, Whitehead and G. E. Moore, Russell alone has an extra-academic reputation. He has taken part in semi-political activities, notably in connection with the Pacifist movement in the 1914-18 war, and written a number of admirable popular books, for example, *The Conquest of Happiness* and *Principles of Social Reconstruction* in which the principles of philosophy are applied to the problems of

## INTRODUCTORY

life. High as is Russell's reputation among contemporary philosophers, it will scarcely be doubted that these non-professional activities have detracted from rather than enhanced it. I have seen many academic eyebrows raised at the mention of these activities, many academic shoulders shrugged over the titles of the non-academic books. Shaw is also a philosopher; he is a philosopher in the popular sense, a dispenser of wise saws, maxims and aphorisms as to the things that should be valued and the way in which life should be lived; and he may also rank as a philosopher in the strict sense, as the propounder of a distinctive version of the philosophy of creative evolution. Indeed, it is hard to read the Preface to *Back to Methuselah* or the last play of the Pentateuch, impossible to read the Hell scene in *Man and Superman*, without realizing that one is making contact with philosophical ideas, no less remarkable for their profundity than their originality, expounded with force and vivacity in the best philosophical dialogue writing since Plato. The themes canvassed are ethical and political, telological and metaphysical and belong to the traditional categories of philosophical discussion. They touch upon the nature of the cosmic purpose, the significance of beauty, the status of mind and the function of matter. The doctrines propounded, for example, the uncompromising anti-hedonism by which Shaw's thought is pervaded, are philosophical doctrines. Some of the observations in regard to the future of human society, for example, the future piercing forecast made forty years ago of the semi-sterilization of the educated classes through the practice of birth control, are of the same order of political generality as the observations and prophecies in the eighth and ninth books of Plato's *Republic*.

One is, indeed, reminded of Plato throughout. For example, the speech in which we are told that the object of the 'force of life' is 'to attain greater power of contemplating itself', a suggestion prompted by Shaw's conviction that the contemplative is the highest kind of life, or the speech beginning, 'No: I sing, not arms and the hero, but the philosophic man: he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means', might have been delivered

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

at the Symposium, as, indeed, might a number of the speeches in the Hell Scene.

Now, whether the doctrines propounded are right or wrong, true or false, is not here to the point. The point is that they belong to the traditional sphere of philosophy and are put forward by a writer who, possessing one of the keenest brains of our time, has achieved an eminence which would, one might have supposed, have secured attention for whatever he had to say on any subject. Yet Shaw's philosophy has been almost entirely ignored by philosophers. For their refusal to take him seriously, or, indeed, to take him at all, it is hard to say whether the brilliance and wit of his non-technical presentation, or his eminence as a world figure in a variety of different spheres, is the more to blame. For my part, I do not doubt that if Shaw had written only philosophy and had not taken pains to make it readable by presenting it in dramatic form, more attention would have been accorded to the doctrines he expounded. One wonders, incidentally, what contemporary philosophers would have said of Plato, if Plato had been a contemporary, or of Voltaire. . . . It is interesting to consider in more detail some of the reasons for the suspicions which academic philosophers have entertained for the *vulgarisateur* as exemplified by their attitude to Shaw and, in a lesser degree, to Russell.

### *Current Objections to the Philosophical Vulgarisateur*

First, they object to philosophers writing about non-philosophical topics. If they must be men of the world they need not, it is intimated, betray the fact by writing about the world. If they do, they cannot, it is implied, also write well about philosophy. If, nevertheless, like Russell, they do write about philosophy and write so well that their work cannot be ignored, then their non-philosophical writings are ignored, or treated as unfortunate lapses. Secondly, they object to the application of philosophy to current moral and political problems. Philosophy, it is implied, more particularly by the school known as Logical Positivism, not only has nothing to say about the universe; it has nothing to say about the times. Its appropriate subject matter is technical—the

## INTRODUCTORY

analysis of the logical structure of language. When it strays out of this sphere, it talks nonsense and misleading nonsense at that. Hence it is better that the plain man, who is ignorant of philosophy, should be thrown helpless on the resources of his unaided reason, than that he should be regaled with metaphysical fairy tales.

Thirdly, they object to philosophy being written in non-technical language, so that the plain man can understand it, much as churchmen in the Middle Ages objected to the Bible being translated so that the layman could understand it. For—the implication, once again, is slipped in—if a philosopher tries to make difficult thought plain to those unacquainted with philosophy by carrying on philosophical discussions in non-technical terms, then (i) his original thought on philosophy can have little or no value; (ii) even his communication of the philosophical thought of others will be suspect on the score of crudity and misdirection. There is, it is intimated, some mysterious essence in Hegel and Kant and even in Plato which simply cannot be conveyed to non-philosophers. If the attempt is made, then Hegel, Kant and Plato will be misrepresented. Hence the vulgarization both offends against philosophy and misleads the public. The conclusion is that the philosopher should keep both philosophy and himself unspotted from the world; at least he must do so, if he is to win the approval of philosophers. It is not in the circumstances to be wondered at that those who so sedulously preserve their studies from contact with the world should themselves lose the contact which they have abjured for their studies. The effects of the loss are exhibited in two directions. Not only are contemporary philosophers without the influence upon affairs which was exercised by their more eminent nineteenth-century predecessors; the world and its problems have, it is obvious, little influence upon their philosophy. Too many contemporary philosophers draw upon for their inspiration and take as their subject matter not life, but other men's philosophies, so that, reading them, one finds difficulty in resisting the temptation to remind oneself of Kierkegaard's assessment of a professor's work as bearing the same relation to the genuine article 'as tea made with a bit of paper which once lay in a drawer beside another bit of paper which once had been used to wrap a few

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

dried tea leaves from which tea had already been made three times'.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Three Virtues of Philosophical Thinking*

In opposition to these views, I would suggest that the three obvious virtues of philosophical thinking are originality, truth and clarity. Of these the second may, it is obvious, exist *without* the first. The first may also, presumably, exist without the second. For, although it is far from clear that originality in error is a philosophical virtue, it may well be the case that a man might put forward novel ideas which although subsequently shown to be false, nevertheless served as a stimulus to the discovery of truth by others; in the history of science this has often happened. Many would, of course, deny altogether the applicability of the concept of truth to philosophical thinking, either because they think that philosophy should be confined to clarifying the thought of others, or because they hold that the merit of a philosophical theory lies in what they call its 'profundity'. I have already<sup>2</sup> repudiated the first ground for this opinion, in so far as it prescribes clarification as the *sole* function of philosophy, and, so far as concerns the second, I find it difficult to understand what meaning the concept of profundity can have, unless we suppose that there is an external reality which we can think profoundly about or probe deeply into. But if the existence of such a reality be conceded, then the purpose of thought is to present and to describe what is, while to think more profoundly is to penetrate more deeply into the nature of what is, so that we are thrown back upon the concept of truth as the virtue of profound philosophical thinking.

However this may be, the philosophical virtue which I am here chiefly anxious to emphasize is the third, clarity. Clarity is primarily a virtue of communication. No doubt it includes the art of thinking clearly, but it includes also skill in so arranging and presenting the results of one's clear thinking that others can share in them. If this be granted, two corollaries follow: first,

<sup>1</sup> From Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Dread* quoted in Guido Ruggiero's book, *Existentialism*.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 21-6 above.

## INTRODUCTORY

clarity is indeed a virtue; it is not merely that to think clearly is a good; it is also a good to gather together, to sift and to present in an intelligible form the thoughts of others. Let us not despise the art of the expositor. Secondly, there is no reason—at least I know of none—why the possession of the third of the virtues I have named should exclude the other two.

Why, because a man has the art of writing clearly and simply, should it be decided that what his art makes easy and agreeable for others to read should, because it *is* easy and agreeable, be superficial? Let us not despise the art of intellectual cookery, whereby the raw materials of others' thinking are served up in a palatable and digestible form. Or why, because a man has skill in expounding the thoughts of others, should it be supposed that he has no thought of his own? The examples of Hume and Voltaire should be enough to expose the falsity of this supposition. Yet how frequently it is made. 'This man,' it is said—though not of course in so many words—'has a knowledge of the world; therefore, he cannot have much knowledge of philosophy'; or, 'this man has not had time to read very much; therefore, nothing that he writes about philosophy can be worth reading'; or again, 'this man has written books about art and literature and society and politics and nature and morals and himself; therefore, no book of his about philosophy can be worth our attention'; finally, and most disablingly, 'this man has written books expounding with considerable clearness the philosophy of other people; therefore, he must be a *mere* expositor and we may take it for granted that he cannot have anything of interest to expound of his own'. All these are ways of expressing the implicit underlying assumption that, if a man has the third of the philosophical virtues, he cannot also have the other two. As to being in and of the world, the more a man knows of the struggles, the movements, the difficulties and the personalities of our time, the better, one would suppose, is he equipped to offer guidance and advice. As to writing books on other subjects, how else is he to apply the general principles which philosophy has taught him? As to not reading books on philosophy or not reading enough of them, I would commend reflection on the implications of that acute saying of Hobbes: 'If I had read as much as other men, I should know no more than other men.' As

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

to a supposedly necessary disjunction between originality and/or truth on the one hand and clarity on the other, the position has only to be stated for its falsity to be apparent.

For my part, I plead guilty to all the counts of the indictment.

I have been much in and of the world, have had experience of administration in the Civil Service and of politics in the Labour Party. I have lived with artists, writers and musicians. I have married and had children. I have lectured to the general public and in the adult education movement have learnt to teach philosophy to laymen who, previously unacquainted with it, nevertheless wanted to be shown the door through which they might enter into the heritage of wisdom which has been bequeathed to us by the past.

In recent years I have had as mixed an intellectual postbag as, I should imagine, anybody in the country, as the outpourings of the crank, the frustrated intellectual, the poor student even, on occasion, the genius have tumbled over one another on my epistolary doorstep. I do not pretend that this treading of many paths and trying of many ways, this meeting with many minds and receiving of many intellectual confidences, has taught me wisdom, but it has given me an insight into the ways of the world and helped me to realize what are the intellectual problems and difficulties which beset ordinary men and women at the present time. Lecturing to comparatively uneducated people, I have had to learn the art of explaining things as clearly and simply as the subject matter permitted; I would like to believe that this discipline has helped me to think clearly myself.

### *The Possibility of Rationalisation Considered*

How far the foregoing account of the function of philosophy and the qualifications of the philosopher may be a rationalization of my own needs and wishes it is difficult for me to judge. It is only right that I should confess that the life of the academic philosopher, reading and lecturing and listening to the essays of students on the traditional subjects of academic philosophy, the theory of knowledge, the nature of moral obligation, the problems



## INTRODUCTORY

of change and substance, the relation of mind to body and the rest does not content me. I enjoy these activities and regard them as important; I should not like my life to be without them, but I should not wish them to constitute my life. Nor in the present state of public affairs can I see the wit of writing esoteric books on philosophy addressed to my own kind. The task is too easy; it is like driving a car round and round a private track instead of outwards into the ever-thickening traffic. The desire to apply and to participate, not only to apply thought to practical affairs but also to participate in them, has always been present. It may be that I have missed my vocation and am a man of action *manqué*; certainly I resist the view that most of those who are engaged in affairs seem prone to take, that a philosopher must be an imbecile in practice, just as I resist the parallel view which prevails in the academic world, that a man who acts to some purpose must think to none.

Both views seem to me to spring from the vicious specialization of our age to an elucidation of which I have devoted a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the consequences of this specialization that the man who tries to function in more than one sphere should be looked at askance in all spheres, the business men making fun of the don's lack of realism and *savoir faire*—it is almost as if they resented his *not* being absent-minded—and the philosophers taking for granted the superficiality of a colleague who strays from the lecture room into government or newspaper office. (Incidentally, one would have thought that the conspicuous success of dons transferred to the Civil Service in two wars should have effectively disposed of at any rate the first of these vicious dichotomies.) Since, however, I have been precluded from playing an effective part in affairs, I comfort myself with the hope that the applications which have been denied to me may be carried out by others. I want, then, to set out my ideas about contemporary society, in the hope that some at least of those who feel themselves attracted by my point of view will be able to work out its implications and applications to the world about us with more success than has fallen to my lot. If this should turn out to be the case, I should have satisfied my need to make philosophy apply,

<sup>1</sup>See chapter xiv.

## THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY

not at first hand in my own life and thought, but by proxy in the life and thought of others.

### *Plan of Book*

The present book has been primarily written as one illustration of the view of philosophy, its function and purpose set forth in this chapter. It is an attempt to enquire into and lay bare some of the principles which have operated in the life of past communities and to apply the results of the enquiry to contemporary communities. The thread which I have taken to guide me through the tangle of enquiries with which I found myself beset is that of decadence. This, I have noticed, is a word which is used in a great variety of connections; we speak of decadent art, decadent literature, decadent characters, decadent periods, decadent communities. Is there, I have asked, a common core of meaning underlying all these various uses of the word? If so, is it possible to discover what it is? In order to answer this question, I have followed Aristotle's method. Having collected and examined a number of current views about decadence, I have proceeded to an examination of some definitions of decadence, in the belief that the most appropriate material for such an enquiry would be afforded by the moral judgements of individuals and communities. For the concept of decadence is, it is obvious, invested with some moral significance; decadence is something to be avoided and avoided because it is bad. When common opinions and familiar definitions are sifted, some are rejected as clearly irrelevant, others are found to be self-contradictory or inconsistent with one another; others, again, are insufficiently precise and require clarification; others are plainly false. But the word 'false' is question begging, because as the enquiry proceeds, it rapidly becomes apparent that questions of valuation are involved. A thing is judged to be decadent by reference to some standard of what is good and valuable which the judger recognizes, even if his recognition is unconscious. Now if the existence of objective value be denied, there are no standards of independent valuation which can be legitimately invoked. Hence, the suggestion that some definitions of decadence are plainly false involves the

## INTRODUCTORY

discussion of a prior question, the question, namely, of objective value which must not be begged in advance.

As a result of the process of collection and sifting, a provisional definition of decadence emerges. Decadence is identified with the valuing of experience for its own sake, irrespective of the quality of the experience, the object of the experience, that upon which the experience is, as it were, directed, being left out of account. Decadence, then, is defined as the 'dropping of the object'. A metaphysical discussion of the nature of the 'object' is here involved, which issues in conclusions indicative of the sort of universe that the acceptance of the 'object' entails. This discussion brings up a number of related questions belonging to the province of philosophy proper, such as the relation of knowledge to its 'object', the nature of judgement, the metaphysical status of beauty and the existence of so-called mental faculties. These matters are discussed and certain conclusions suggested which are consonant with the definition of decadence previously advanced, the definition being thereby confirmed. In the second part of the book, I proceed on the basis of the definition to examine contemporary developments in the arts, in literature, in morals, in politics and in social ethics, with a view to discovering how far our own society conforms to it. Some of the changes that are necessary, if our society is to escape the charge of decadence, are indicated, some speculations in regard to the future ventured.

## CHAPTER II

# Decadence : Some Definitions Discussed and Rejected

---

### *Introduction*

Many philosophical works are devoted to an examination of the notion of 'good', but comparatively few to its opposite. At the present time it is hard not to feel a vivid interest in its opposite. Evil, no doubt, has been always at large in the world, but it has not always been so obtrusive. It may help to throw some light upon the nature of evil, to undertake an enquiry into decadence, for decadence clearly has some relation to evil and is in some sense opposed to good. The subject is also topical since our society is sometimes called a decadent society and our art is frequently called decadent art.

There is not, I think, any word whose meaning is vaguer and more difficult to define than the word 'decadence'. There is also no word, not even the word 'progress', which is used in a greater variety of senses. The multiplicity of senses in which the word 'decadence' is used is both a result and a contributory cause of the vagueness of the concept which the word purports to denote. It results from it, because when people speak of decadence they rarely have a clear idea in their minds which they use the word to express; it contributes to it, since the essential meaning, if there is one, is buried and lost under the multitude of attributes which accrete round and obscure it, as barnacles obscure the outline of a rock.

Also, it is remarkable how few in comparison with the studies of progress and development are the studies of decadence. I am acquainted only with one work which deals explicitly with the subject, a lecture published in 1908 entitled *Decadence* by the

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

late Lord Balfour. This, however, is concerned only with political decadence.<sup>1</sup> A book entitled *Degeneration* by Max Nordau appeared in 1893; its thesis is that all genius is a form of degeneration, is, in fact, a symptom of madness. This, however, was laughed out of court in an essay by Bernard Shaw entitled *The Sanity of Art* written in 1895, reprinted with a new preface in 1907 and ultimately included in a volume entitled *Major Critical Essays*.

In view of the difficulty of the subject it will be well to begin with a number of discursive observations which may help to clear the ground. These will occupy this chapter and the next. Having skirted round the subject and approached it with proper circumspection, I shall venture in the fourth chapter to suggest a definition designed to cover some at least of the phenomena usually associated with decadence. In Part II I shall ask how far these phenomena are characteristic of our age.

### *Is there Decadence?*

In view of the variety of meanings in which the word is used, it may be asked whether there is such a thing as decadence, whether, that is to say, there is *any* core of meaning for which the word stands which is common to and present in all the senses in which it is used.

The main reason for thinking that there is such a common core of meaning seems to me to be the relative clarity of its opposite. We all, that is to say, know broadly what is meant by vital, vigorous art and by a vital, vigorous society; at any rate we think we can recognize them when we meet them in history or in literature. As examples of non-decadent writers to which most of us would be prepared to subscribe may be cited the names of Homer, Chaucer, Rabelais, Dickens, Tolstoy, all of whom were men of exuberant vitality and fertility; as clear examples of non-decadent ages, the ages of the early Roman Republic and of Elizabethan England. When in application to these writers and these ages we use such words as 'vigorous', 'vital', 'robust', 'fertile', 'exuberant', we do, I think, denote by them a central core of meaning which is broadly the same in all the instances in which the words are

<sup>1</sup> See for a description of this book, p. 421.

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

used. Even though it may be difficult to define or even to describe this meaning, we all of us feel that, in a general way, we know what it is. If this is true, it seems equally plausible to suppose that to this meaning there is an opposite, that decadence, in other words, stands for the reverse of the concepts indicated by the words I have named. Nor, I think, is it difficult to see why if there is, indeed, as I surmise, an opposite, that is to say, a central core of meaning which is the reverse of the fairly clear meaning we assign to vigour, robustness and vitality, it should be more difficult to describe and to define. Vitality is, by definition, something positive and aggressive; it hits you, as it were, like a blow. Decadence is something passive and diffused; it seeps into an age like an atmosphere; it pervades a body of literary or artistic work like a smell.

Now it is harder to give an account of a smell, saying where it begins, where it attains its maximum and where it ends, than it is to recognize and locate a blow.

## SUGGESTED DEFINITIONS

### (1) *Form without Content*

Form without content is often put forward as a definition or, at least, as a sign of decadence. Let us suppose that a traditional form has been employed with success in the past, that important things have been said and works of value produced in that form. Writers and artists then continue to write, paint and compose in this form, when they have no content of importance to put into it. They produce poems, tracts, essays or sermons, not because they are impelled by a consuming desire to say something which seems to them to be convincingly right, but because it seems right to them to say something. As a result, the form and style of the work, which, rightly regarded, are only the vehicles in which the artist or writer brings his wares to market to offer them to the public, become themselves the wares.

This definition applies fairly well to literature. Thus, during the first four centuries of the Roman Empire poets<sup>1</sup> wrote epic and

<sup>1</sup>E.g. Papinius Statius and Silius Italicus in the first century A.D., Nemesianus in the third, Ausonius in the fourth and Namatianus in the fifth.

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

descriptive poetry in the style of Virgil, who had little or no motive for writing except that Virgil was a model and they wanted to show that they could, in fact, write like Virgil. In the eighteenth century men wrote poems in the form of the heroic couplet, enriched with liberal references to Latin and Greek mythology, whose main reason for doing so was that Dryden, Pope and Thomson had set the fashion for writing in heroic couplets and referring to Latin and Greek mythology. Having nothing very much to say, they could only follow the example of their predecessors. Pope himself, in his *An Essay on Criticism*, has described their condition with his usual pointedness. He is speaking of those 'who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear!'

*'While,' he writes, 'they ring round the same unvary'd chimes  
With sure returns of still expected rhymes,  
Where'er you find "the cooling western breeze"  
In the next line, it "whispers through the trees";  
If crystal streams "with pleasing murmurs creep":  
The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) "with sleep."*

*Inapplicability of the Definition to Societies.* I agree that conventional writing in an accepted form by one who has nothing very much to say produces boring and insipid work, but I do not think that this is what we mean when we speak of 'decadent' art. My reason is this. It seems to me that if there is, as I am supposing, a central core of meaning which the word 'decadence' bears, it must bear it in all the contexts in which it is used. What those who speak of a 'decadent' society or a 'decadent' person mean must have something in common with what is meant when they speak of 'decadent' literature. Now I cannot see that the notion of form without content has any very obvious application to a decadent society. The Victorian age observed many forms from which the content had departed. For example, people went to church not because they were religious, but because they desired to be seen going to church and to see others going to church. Ladies called on and drank tea with one another, not because they wished to see one another or had anything to say that interested any of the ladies who were parties to the rite, but because 'calling' was a mark

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

of social gentility. I do not, however, believe that the Victorian was in any very obvious sense a decadent age. Indeed, it is not very clear what meaning the notion of form without content, as applied to a society, could bear.

*And to Music.* In music, although the distinction between form and content is clearly in some sense applicable, I do not believe that it can be applied in the same way as it is applied in literature. Music consists of sounds as literature of words and both the words of which poetry and the sounds of which music is composed are arranged in a form or pattern; but in music the form or pattern matters so much and the sound so little that to suggest that there could be form in music with content, and to suggest further that, if there were, this would constitute a defect in the music, is to convey a number of false implications.

Consider, for example, the statement of the theme of a Bach fugue which we will suppose a pianist to be picking out with the fingers of one hand upon the piano. Let us suppose that the statement consists of nine notes and let those notes first be played in a random order. Wires are struck by hammers, sound waves travel through the atmosphere, nerve endings in the outer ears are stimulated, and neural currents travel through the outer and middle ears into the brain. Here a complicated set of neural disturbances is initiated as a result of which we have the sensation of hearing the sounds. An account of what has happened can be given in terms of physics, physiology and psychology; the account could in theory be made exhaustive. Now let us suppose that the order of the notes is so altered that they do in fact form the statement of the theme of the fugue. All the events which took place in the preceding instance, the events of which physics, physiology and psychology give their various accounts recur, but this time something is added; this time there is also an aesthetic effect which can thrill the hearer to ecstasy. Now this aesthetic effect which is, after all, what matters and *all* that matters in music, is produced not by a change in the sounds—for the sounds in each case are the same—but by a change in the form. The only alterations have been in the order in which the notes are struck and in the time intervals which elapse between them. Now order and time intervals are not themselves sounds, are not, in fact,



## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

physical things at all. Thus the specific excellence of music consists not so much in the sounds as in the arrangement of the sounds ; consists, in fact, in the form. Indeed, one might venture to suggest that the affinity of music with mathematics rather than with literature is due precisely to this feature which is common to music and mathematics. I can best describe this common feature by saying that in each medium what matters is less what is sounded or figured than the form or arrangement in which the sounds or figures occur. Thus, whether the same integers, three and two, 'make' six, five, one and a half or one depends upon whether the relation between them is one of multiplication, addition, division or subtraction. It is, then, the relation between the integers and not the integers related which determines the differences of result in these four cases. Similar considerations apply to the case of music. That this is so may be more clearly seen if we ask the question, what is a sound ? The answer has already been indicated ; a sound is a series of vibrations in the atmosphere which produce complicated neural responses in the brain. These responses are the last events in the linked causal chain of physical and physiological events which precede the sensation of hearing. Are these events in the nerves and the brain, which in the last resort are analysable into waves of positive and negative electricity, characterized by the attribute of beauty ? I think that they are not ; nor are the vibrations in the atmosphere, nor the movements of horsehair across catgut, nor the impact of hammers upon wires. These events are inescapably rooted in the natural world, the world of change and matter. Their analysis belongs to physics. They are not, then, inhabitants of that order of being with which aesthetics is concerned. I conclude that whatever may be the source of the delight that thrills us in listening to music it is not sound as such, but sound in a specific form of arrangement ; in other words, the form is the distinguishing essence.<sup>1</sup>

I add that there are composers who adhere to rigid and traditional forms and write continuously in them as, for example, Haydn, who wrote in the form of the conventional four movement quartet, are obviously not decadent. I conclude that since in music the form matters so much, the content comparatively so little, the

<sup>1</sup>I return to this question in chapter viii. See pp. 173-87.

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

view that decadence is form without content is inapt in its application to music.

### (2) *Failure to Maintain a Level in a Realized Form*

This definition is similar to, but not identical with, the last; it presupposes that a certain level of excellence, for example, in a mode of writing in a prescribed form has been realized, and that this level is not maintained by those who later follow the same mode in the same form. This failure to hold a level is identified by many with decadence. This view is well stated in the following quotation from an article by Peter Quennell on an anthology of Chinese poetry entitled *From the Chinese*. He is writing more particularly of the art and literature of the T'ang and Sung dynasties, over-civilized eras which suggest to him the pessimistic reflection that 'every extreme refinement of sensibility must one day overreach itself. The culture that spreads too far will eventually spread too thin'. 'Nothing,' Mr. Quennell goes on, with reference to the effect of such a civilization upon the creative writer, 'nothing is so inimical to the artist's creative gift as a civilization that, instead of discarding inherited standards of taste (as happened in Europe after the Industrial Revolution), preserves certain vestiges of a traditional sense of style, unsupported by the imaginative vitality that gives taste and a sense of style their true aesthetic value. Such, at different times, has been the predicament of the civilizations built up by Japan and China.'

To take examples nearer home, Pope in the eighteenth century brought the Heroic Couplet to a level of excellence which was never surpassed and rarely equalled. But people continued to write in Heroic Couplets for nearly a century and on the whole wrote worse as the century proceeded. Cowper describes their condition admirably in his *Table Talk*:

'But he,' he writes of Pope,

*'(His musical finesse was such  
So nice his ear so delicate his touch)  
Made poetry a mere mechanic art  
And every warbler has his tune by heart,'*

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

as, for example, John Hoole, 1727–1803, who continued to write in the form of the Heroic Couplet for no good reason whatever. A more extreme example is that of Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) who, wishing to express certain biological and botanical theories which Shaw subsequently developed in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah* and elsewhere, chose the Heroic Couplet for their exposition and produced the *Loves of the Plants*.

Flaubert and Stendhal wrote realistic novels of human nature about as well as they can be written; Proust, obviously influenced by both and choosing a not dissimilar *métier* to develop similar preoccupations, produced the not so good *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The view is, I think, sufficiently clear without multiplication of examples. Erasmus Darwin and Proust are said to be decadent writers because, where a high level of excellence has already been achieved in a certain department, they subsequently achieved a lower level in the same department.

It is not necessary to criticize this view at length, since if the reasons for rejecting the former definition were valid, they are valid against this one also. It has no doubt *some* application to the case of music but it is only remotely that it applies to that of societies. Further, it would seem to presuppose that a level of high achievement has in fact been attained from which that which is stigmatized as decadent is a declension. No doubt in some cases, for example in that of the Heroic Couplet, this is true; but its truth is far from clear in all the cases in which decadence is with some show of reason alleged. It is far from clear, for instance, in the case of those most frequently cited examples of decadence, the poets, painters and writers of the 'nineties. What, one wonders, is the level of excellence from which *they* register a decline?

Wilde, for example, is often accused of being decadent, but who wrote better comedies of manners than *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*? Or from what level of realized achievement are the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley or the poems of Ernest Dowson a declension? Failure in literature to maintain a level in an already perfected form may conceivably be a sign of decadence, even perhaps its constant accompaniment, but it is not its definition.

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

### (3) *Identification of Decadence with Immorality*

What I take to be the commonest conception of decadence links it with morals, or, rather, with their lack. The decadent are, in some undefined way, immoral or lacking in morality. If the term 'morality' is taken in a wide connotation to which questions of the meaning and purpose of the universe, the status of man's life within it and the way it should be conducted are all relevant, it may well be that there is truth in this view. I think, indeed, that there is. But in the popular conception of the meaning of the term which in Anglo-Saxon countries identifies it almost exclusively with sexual morality—to be moral is to go to bed only with one's wife; to be immoral is to go to bed with somebody else's or with nobody's—which dubs the Roman Empire decadent because Nero indulged in 'orgies', Messalina exposed herself in a brothel and the behaviour described in Petronius's *Supper of Trimalchio* is different from that of a Scottish Manse, blanches pleasurably at the 'goings on' of the Marquis de Sade and is shocked to remember that Wilde was imprisoned for sodomy—in this conception there is, I think, very little to be said for the view that to be decadent is to be immoral. Rabelais, Aristophanes, Sappho, Catullus, Lucretius, Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Lafontaine, Voltaire, Swift, Congreve and Fielding, to take a few names at random, do not take what is usually called a strict view of sexual relations in their books, plays and fables. Nor, for all I know to the contrary, did they adhere to it in their lives; yet it is absurd to call them decadent. The great conquerors of the world, Tamerlane, Genghiz Khan, Cyrus, Alexander, Sulla, Hannibal, Pompey, Sargon and Peter the Great, almost certainly had mistresses and concubines, but they were not decadent. I suspect that the same would be found to be true of outstanding statesmen, but of the ancients in this class I know little, while of the moderns it would be imprudent to speak. Now, great conquerors, generals and statesmen have been responsible for much human misery and the effects which they have had upon the countries which were unfortunate enough to produce them have been almost uniformly disastrous. But aptness for the production of misery certainly cannot be equated with the notion of decadence. On the contrary,

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

the ability efficiently to organize mass slaughter on a large scale is highly esteemed and those who have possessed it are accorded an honoured place in the history books. (It would be an interesting experiment to seek to establish a ratio between the scale on which slaughter is organized on the one hand and the honours accorded to the organizing general at the time and the amplitude of his place in the records of history and the judgement of posterity on the other.) The Napoleon of 1813–15, the Napoleon who drew at Leipzig and lost at Waterloo, is sometimes said to be decadent, not because he did not organize mass slaughter as successfully as before he knew defeat, but because after a long career of success he was defeated.

Once the preoccupation with sexual morality is transcended, the alleged correspondence between decadence and lack of morality ceases to have any very obvious meaning. Writers who seem decadent are not immoral; the authors of books in which morality is 'loose' are not decadent. I say 'seem' because it is exceedingly difficult to cite any examples of decadence in literature which would be generally accepted as such. To mention a name is to find oneself fatally entangled in the relativities and subjectivities of one's own personal taste or of the taste of the times to which one belongs. I, for example, hold that Debussy was a decadent composer, by which I mean, or think that I mean, that his music produces on me a lowering effect; as I listen, I feel my vitality and zest for life draining away, while the lights and shades of variously coloured existence and, what is more to the point, the contrast between the lights and the shades which gives its savour to existence, are reduced to a flat monochrome of dreary grey. For the same reason I should say that Delius is more decadent even than Debussy. How invertebrate are those clouds of wandering sound! Yet few would be found to agree with this verdict and, when I venture to pronounce it, I am reminded that Debussy was the fertile originator of new musical forms and scales, the source and not the fag end of a movement.

Virginia Woolf seems to me to be a decadent writer. I shall try later to give reasons for this view.<sup>1</sup> For the present, I content myself by drawing attention to her preoccupation with the minutiae of

<sup>1</sup>See chapter iv., p. 99.

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

experience and the trivialities of personal relationship, her emphasis upon the human as the sole source of interest and standard of value, and her persistent refusal to grade, to give moral marks or to assign values. One experience for her is as good or as valuable as another, precisely because to say of an experience that it is good or valuable has, for her, no definite meaning. After reading her, nothing seems to me to be very much worth while, or, rather, no one thing seems to be more worth while than another. I am well aware how little assent this judgement is likely to command, but whether they be entitled decadent or not, what in either event have Debussy or Virginia Woolf to do with morality or its lack?

### (4) *Some Political Definitions*

(a) *Decadence and Military Weakness.* Decadence is often associated, if not identified, with military weakness. Thus, if a nation which has been strong and victorious becomes weak and defeated, or if after a long period of expansion an empire begins to contract, then the nation or empire is said to be decadent. Thus, Athens is sometimes said to have been decadent in the fourth century B.C. because she lost her fifth-century empire. One of the reasons why decadence is often attributed to Imperial Rome in the third and fourth centuries A.D. is that the barbarians overran her. Again, we are told that it was because of the decadence of the Byzantine Empire that the Turks in the middle of the fifteenth century overran the eastern and western coasts of the Aegean and took Constantinople. Spain, when she lost part of her overseas empire to Britain in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, is said to have been in a state of decadence and so on.

Many of those who would explicitly repudiate the equation, non-decadence equals military strength, decadence equals military weakness, would seem implicitly to accept it, if we are to judge by the frequent expressions of opinion into which they are betrayed.

A less extreme form of this view maintains that there is a necessary connection between security and non-decadence. That a nation should be able to defend itself is not *sufficient* to justify us

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

in regarding it as being non-decadent but, it is said, it is *necessary*. Contemporary France is often charged with decadence because she could not defend herself against the Germans.

*Criticism of this Conception.* I do not think this definition will bear analysis. It may be that *some* of the causes which result in a nation's military weakness are signs of decadence, but it cannot plausibly be maintained that all of them are. For example, one would not normally think of Saxon England immediately prior to the Norman Conquest as a decadent country; on the contrary it was rude, crude and vigorous. Weakened by internal dissensions which the very vigour of tribal partisanship and political passion exacerbated, it was defeated and overrun by superior strategy, organization and weapons. In the sixteenth century the Swiss, protected by their mountains, robust, primitive, violent and war-like, were the most famous mercenaries in Europe. Even in the eighteenth century no national army was complete without its corps of Swiss Guards. Are we, then, to regard the Swiss as decadent because they now keep hotels, succour refugees and have housed our first poor attempt at international government?

In the eighth and ninth centuries the Vikings were the terror of the north; the Danes are now the world's best agriculturists. Are they, therefore, decadent? Presumably not! Yet even after two great wars it is strange how hard the myth dies that greatness in a nation is somehow bound up with willingness to inflict and efficiency in the infliction of slaughter on a large scale. I mention the Vikings of the north because before me, as I write, is a recent book on Denmark sent to me by its author. One of the chapters is headed 'Age of Greatness and Decline'. The 'age of greatness', I reflected, will almost certainly be the age in which the Vikings overran large tracts of Europe, slaying, raping, burning and destroying. I was right. 'Many wars were fought in the south.' 'During the reign of Valdemar the Victorious, Danish domination extended both eastward and southward.' The chapter is studded with similar statements. And the decline? The passage dealing with decline begins: 'When the great Viking period came to an end and the population turned to peaceful occupations . . .'

Under modern conditions the alleged connection between decadence and lack of military power, at all times dubious,

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

manifestly breaks down. For example, the effect of modern transport and modern weapons has been to put it beyond the power of any small State successfully to defend itself. Are we, then, to say that Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Switzerland are decadent? In the future, so far as one can see, any country, if such there be, which does not possess the secret of the atomic bomb will be helpless against any country which does. But we cannot equate its scientists' ignorance of how to split the atom as equivalent to, or even as a sign of the decadence of their country.

For my part, I must confess my inability to see any connection between military power and national merit. For what, after all, is military power? It is the power to impose your will upon others by virtue of your superior efficiency in organizing mass slaughter. It is, in other words, the power of the bully and the blackmailer. It may plausibly be urged that the power is sometimes necessary for survival but not, I should have thought, that it connotes some form of value. It is not, I think, possible to believe that Jesus Christ would for a moment have countenanced the view that military strength was a necessary sign of national virtue, or that military weakness, if combined with moral strength, as it is, for example, in the case of Gandhi, is a sign of national defect or decay. To refuse to expect the policies of States to be guided in practice by Christian ethics is, I daresay, reasonable enough. It will, no doubt, be a long time yet before the practices of the world square with its professions; but the first step is for its professions to condemn its practices. We used to think that this step had been taken; more recently we have become doubtful, but, to me at least, it is clear that to equate the application of Christ's principles to the policies and practices of States with decadence is to take a step in the opposite direction.

It is difficult to see how those who regard themselves as His followers can permit themselves to take a different view. Lest, however, it be thought that the introduction of Christian ethics into a discussion of the criteria of political worth and national well-being is inappropriate—and it must be admitted that to fit Christian ethics to State conduct is extremely difficult—I venture to base my conclusion on the more mundane though no less obvious fact of the lack of connection between military greatness, whether



## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

combined with or unaccompanied by national efficiency, with literary and artistic vigour, in witness whereof I propose to cite the following observation from H. A. L. Fisher's *A History of Europe* upon the political weakness and confusion of fifteenth-century Germany: 'There is, however,' he writes, 'no necessary connection between political good sense and the spiritual and artistic progress of a people. The essential virtue of Germany lay, not in its empire or its great prelates and princes, and still less in its grasp of the essentials of public policy, but in the thousands of gifted and ingenious town workers who built Gothic churches and cathedrals, developed the organ, wrought as carvers and sculptors in stone and wood and bronze and by their engravings, paintings and metal work secured a brilliant repute throughout the world for the craftsmanship of the German race.'

One thinks in the same connection of Dante's defiant assertion amid the confusion of late thirteenth-century Italian politics, that because Italy lacked a king she was not without a court. Was not her language, he asked, a kingdom in itself? Or of Dr. Johnson's declaration that the greatness of a country depends upon its authors.

(b) *Decadence and a Declining Population*. It is often said that when the numbers of a race or the population of a country begins to decline, the country or race is thereby convicted of decadence. Whether this is so or not, depends upon the reasons for the decline. The population of many South Sea Islands began to decline after the arrival of 'the white man'. Moreover, decadence has frequently been attributed to those islanders who survived; they lost, it is said, the virtues of their own civilization and substituted only the vices of ours. Now the refusal or the inability to produce children in a case of this kind is a *sign* of decadence in a quite literal sense; it is a sign, that is to say, that the race is dying out. But decadence usually carries an evil connotation, and whether the dying out is a good thing or a bad, depends upon whether the civilization and the race that dies was itself bad or good, and also upon whether the civilization—in this particular case, our own civilization—that replaces it is better or worse than the one it replaces.

The most familiar case of a declining population or, more

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

precisely, of a population about to decline is our own; ours is also the case of all the countries of Europe, with the exception of the Balkans and Russia.

What are the causes whose operation will shortly produce this decline? They are well known and reasonably well agreed.

(a) The employment of women, leading to a later age of marriage.

(b) The fact that small children are no longer economic assets but are economic liabilities. For example, in the early part of the last century children were conceived in large numbers, in order that they might be sent to work in mine or mill at an early age and so increase the exiguous earnings of the family. Now, they must be educated until they are fourteen and the period of compulsory education has recently been increased. During this period a child must in part be maintained by and will not earn for the family.

(c) The practice of birth control.

(d) A spiritual *malaise* which finds expression in the conviction that life is not worth living and children, therefore, not worth producing. This *malaise* is frequently said to be bound up with the decline in religious belief.

Of these four causes it is clear that the first two do not entail decadence. In regard to the third, which is by far the most important, we cannot avoid asking the question, for what purpose is birth control practised? If it is practised in order that the parents may live in greater ease and comfort, because, let us suppose, they are selfish, or because their values are purely material, or because they are snobbish and desire to make a better show than their neighbours, or because they are sporting and prefer cars to cradles, then it may well be that in some sense of the word 'decadent' such parents are decadent. But it may also be the case that the main motive for the practice of birth control is the demand for a higher quality or standard of life, where quality and standard are not assessed in purely material terms.

For example, the desire may be to give one's children a good education and a better start in life than one had oneself. Given a limited family income, the satisfaction of this desire is incompatible with the production of many children. Now it cannot

## DECADENCE: SOME DEFINITIONS

be said that the planned forethought which resolves to produce only a couple of children, to educate them well and to give them a good start in life, as compared with the indifference which produces half a dozen who are handicapped by the poverty of a straitened home, by lack of food and space and by an inadequate education, is a sign of decadence.

The fourth cause cannot be shortly discussed. I content myself here with the observation that it is far from self-evident that the refusal to bring children into a world which holds out a reasonable prospect of their destruction by the atomic bomb is censurable on the ground of decadence, though it may well be said that the civilization which holds out no better prospect is a decadent civilization.

## CHAPTER III

### Some Considerations on the Agreeableness and Fertility of so-called Decadent Ages

**D**ecadent ages are not necessarily disagreeable to live in; non-decadent are frequently far from agreeable. Indeed, there is some ground for thinking that a robust, vigorous age, the age, let us say, of the Roman Republic or of Elizabethan England, may exceed the average in point of human suffering. So-called ages of faith have been outstandingly ruthless. In general, violence and insecurity in their grossest forms, murder, looting, rape and torture accompanied by continuous warfare are characteristics of young and vital ages; so, too, are famine, pestilence and disease.

#### *Characteristics of Ages of Faith*

It is, I think, possible to discern a reason for this. The young, vital ages of history are also ages of strong belief. In the past the strongest beliefs have usually been religious. For example, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries different sects maintained with a passionate partisanship the literal truth of some particular metaphorical statement about the inexpressible nature of the Creator, His intentions, His interventions in human affairs by a series of mighty acts, of which the most outstanding was the incarnation of Jesus Christ, His Son, about the correct interpretation of Christ's teaching, about the correct mode of worshipping God, about the credentials of the Catholic Church as an authoritative vehicle of His continuing spirit, and so on. The acceptance of these beliefs they demanded with the intolerant dogmatism of persecuting zeal. The beliefs may, of course, have been true, but their truth was neither certain nor demonstrable. Demonstration being lacking, non-decadent man supplies its place by converting his

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

conjectures into dogmas and then defending the dogmas to the last ounce of his energy and the last drop of his blood, regarding it as the height of wickedness to act and think otherwise than in accordance with them, and inflicting appalling cruelties upon all who venture to do so. That the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son, or that He proceeds from the Father only; that bread and wine are or are not body and blood, or that, in some esoteric sense, they both are and are not at the same time, are propositions in defence of which men have killed one another and tortured one another in thousands. It is a curious reflection that it is only when truth is absent, unknown or uncertain that people have been willing to behave in this way. Thus, it is certainly erroneous that the light of the sun will grow dim, unless the sun god is fed with the flesh of living human sacrifice, while it is far from being certainly true that matter is inherently evil and that as a consequence vegetarianism should be practised and marriage eschewed. Yet, in the interests of the certain error, Aztec priests have deprived hundreds of human beings of their lives; in defence of the far from certain truth the Catharist Albigenses in the South of France submitted in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to all the horrors of a Crusade preached against them by Pope Innocent III with such constant endurance that in the end most of them were exterminated by death or torture. Where the truth is known and certain, it causes comparatively little enthusiasm. Thus, on behalf of the true propositions that three and two make five, that the mean distance of the Moon from the Earth is 238,800 miles, that water at sea level freezes at 32° Fahrenheit, nobody so far as I know has been prepared to make the world uncomfortable for, still less to inflict physical agony upon, anybody. Now nobody would call, nobody does, in fact, call the ages of passionately held belief, for example, the age that embarked upon the Crusades or the age of the Counter Reformation, decadent; yet how far from agreeable they must have been to live in.

### *Germany in the Seventeenth Century*

Consider, for example, the condition of Germany at the end of the Thirty Years War, the condition portrayed in Callot's

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

etchings. Bands of soldiers wandered over the face of the land living on loot and massacring, torturing and raping as they went. There was—I am quoting Aldous Huxley's account—'raping and casual plundering, shooting and hanging in plenty, with torture to relieve the monotony and breakings on the wheel as a Sunday treat'. In England the King was busy fighting the Parliament. France was agitated by the pointless skirmishings of the Fronde. Reflecting upon the conditions of life as he had experienced them, Pascal came to the conclusion that peace and order were the supremely valuable political and social goods and recommended passive obedience to the legally constituted authority, however bad and oppressive, on the ground that anything was better than continual fighting. But nobody has called the first half of the seventeenth century in Western and Central Europe decadent.

*The Elizabethan Age.* Or consider the Elizabethan Age, an age of great military expansion, of strongly maintained religious belief, of purposeful and vigorous government; an age in which, for some of those who have left their mark upon its record, life must, I imagine, have seemed supremely worth living; an age, above all, which stands for the very reverse of all that we normally associate with decadence.

And yet—it may well be that the avowal will set the reader against me, as being myself decadent—one cannot avoid the suspicion that it is not an age in which one would oneself have much liked to live. The dominating characteristic of the Elizabethans was their inconsistency. 'What kind of mental fabric could that have been'—I am quoting from Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex*—'which had for its warp the habits of filth and savagery of sixteenth-century London and for its woof an impassioned familiarity with the splendour of *Tamburlaine* and the exquisiteness of *Venus and Adonis*? Who can reconstruct those iron-nerved beings who passed with rapture from some divine madrigal sung to a lute by a bewitching boy in a tavern to the spectacle of mauled dogs tearing a bear to pieces? Iron-nerved? Perhaps; yet the flaunting man of fashion, whose cod-piece proclaimed an astonishing virility, was he not also, with his flowing hair and his jewelled ears, effeminate? And the curious

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

society which loved such fantasies and delicacies—how readily would it turn and rend a random victim with hideous cruelty! A change of fortune—a spy's word—and those same ears might be sliced off, to the laughter of the crowd, in the pillory; or, if ambition or religion made a darker embroilment, a more ghastly mutilation—amid a welter of moral platitudes fit only for the nursery and dying confessions in marvellous English—might diversify a traitor's end.'

How was it possible, one wonders, with Aldous Huxley, 'for men to be at once so subtly refined and so brutal, so sensual and yet so spiritual, such men of action and so much enamoured of contemplation, so religious and so cynical'.

Yet, where so much is contradictory, it is, for me at least, difficult to exclude from the mind the dominating impression of brutality.

'The Doctor' (Lopez) 'standing on the scaffold attempted in vain to make a dying speech; the mob was too angry and too delighted to be quiet; it howled with laughter, when, amid the uproar, the Jew was heard asseverating that he loved his mistress better than Jesus Christ; no more was heard and the old man was hurried to the gallows. He was strung up and—such was the routine of the law—cut down while life was still in him. Then the rest of the time-honoured punishment—castration, disembowelling, and quartering—was carried out. Ferreira was the next to suffer. After that, it was the turn of Tinoco. He had seen what was to be his fate, twice repeated, and from close enough. His ears were filled with the shrieks and moans of his companions, and his eyes with every detail of the contortions and the blood. And so his adventures had ended thus at last. And yet, they had not quite ended; for Tinoco, cut down too soon, recovered his feet after the hanging. He was lusty and desperate; and he fell upon his executioner. The crowd, wild with excitement, and cheering on the plucky foreigner, broke through the guards, and made a ring to watch the fight. But, before long, the instincts of law and order reasserted themselves. Two stalwart fellows, seeing that the executioner was giving ground, rushed forward to his rescue. Tinoco was felled by a blow on the head; he was held down firmly on the scaffold; and, like the others, castrated, disembowelled,

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

and quartered.’<sup>1</sup> No, I do not think that the Elizabethan age could have been agreeable to live in—but, assuredly, it was not decadent.

### *That So-called Decadent Ages are Frequently Agreeable*

The converse, that decadent ages are often agreeable to live in is, I suspect, true, but it is difficult to substantiate, difficult even to illustrate because of the difficulty of establishing an agreed instance of a decadent age. Perhaps one might say that two of the marks of decadent ages, or of what are commonly regarded as decadent ages, are that men should no longer desire anything with sufficient intensity to think it worth while to inflict misery upon other men in order to obtain it, and no longer hold any belief with sufficient conviction to be willing to turn the world into a shambles for the sake of ‘the truth’. The first mark seems to go with a high level of material well-being and economic sufficiency; the second, with an increase of assurance in regard to those propositions whose truth is knowable coupled with diminishing certainty in regard to those which are uncertain and whose truth cannot in any event be known. In other words, tolerance and scepticism seem to characterize ages in which science is growing and faith diminishing.

In Aldous Huxley’s book, *Time Must Have a Stop*, Eustace Barnack, who many would regard as a good example of a decadent man—he is lazy, selfish, sensual, does little or no good in the world and thinks only of the gratification of his tastes and the satisfaction of his desires—quotes the following quatrain:

*‘There was an old man of Moldavia  
Who did not believe in the Saviour,  
So he founded instead  
With himself at the head  
The cult of decorous behaviour!’*

Huxley, in the person of Eustace Barnack, comments: ‘“Or, in other words, Confucianism. But, unfortunately, China was

<sup>1</sup>From Lytton Strachey’s *Elizabeth and Essex*.



## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

also full of Buddhists and Taoists and miscellaneous war-lords. People with bullying temperaments, and people with inhibited, scrupulous temperaments. Horrible people like Napoleon, and other horrible people like Pascal. There was an Old Man of Corsica who would not believe in anything but power. And an Old Man of Port Royal who tortured himself by believing in the God of Abraham and Isaac, not of the philosophers. Between them, they don't give the poor Old Man of Moldavia a dog's chance. Not in China or anywhere else. . . . If I had the knowledge," he went on, "or the energy, I'd write an outline of world history. Not in terms of geography, or climate, or economics, or politics. None of these is fundamental. In terms of temperament. In terms of the eternal three-cornered struggle between the Old Man of Moldavia, the Old Man of Corsica and the Old Man of Port Royal. . . .

"Christ, of course, had been an Old Man of Port Royal. So were Buddha and most of the other Hindus. So was Lao-Tsu. But Mahomet had had a lot of the Old Man of Corsica in him. And the same, of course, was true of any number of the Christian saints and doctors. So you got violence and rapine, practised by proselytizing bullies and justified in terms of theology devised by introverts. And meanwhile the poor Old Men of Moldavia got kicked and abused by everybody. Except perhaps among the Pueblo Indians, there had never been a predominantly Moldavian society—a society where it was bad form to nourish ambitions, heretical to have a personal religion, criminal to be a leader of men, and virtuous to have a good time in peace and quietness." "

For those who believe in the cult of decorous behaviour, who seek, in other words, to have a good time through the cultivation of the senses and the dedication of the self to the satisfaction of the self's desires, feel themselves under no obligation to spread 'the truth' by making the world uncomfortable for other people, though incidentally, of course, they may. "Demonstrably," Eustace goes on, "we do much less mischief than the other fellows. We don't start any wars, or Albigenian crusades, or communist revolutions. 'Live and let live'—that's our motto. Whereas *their* idea of goodness is 'die and make to die'—get

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

yourself killed for your idiotic cause, and kill everybody who doesn't happen to agree with you. Hell isn't merely paved with good intentions; it's walled and roofed with them. Yes, and furnished too." ' Unfortunately, however, the books have been written, the moral codes drawn up, the governments run by the convinced believers and earnest endeavourers who regard the 'good timers' as decadent and invariably denounce them. The " "masters of the fine art of living are not," ' Eustace complains, " "admired; they're regarded as idlers and wasters. The moral codes have always been framed by people like your father<sup>1</sup>—or, at the very best, people like Bruno.<sup>2</sup> People like me have hardly been able to get a word in edgeways. And when we do get our word in—as we did once or twice during the eighteenth century—nobody listens to us seriously." ' "

Doubtful, perhaps, in its application to societies, the moral, in its relation to individuals, seems inescapable. A disposition to let alone, to live as seems good to oneself, and to be prepared to let others live as seems good to themselves makes for social agreeableness; nevertheless, it is frequently taken as a sign of decadence, on the ground, presumably, that it is to be regarded as the expression not so much of an active and positive tolerance as of a Laodicean indifference. Yet can there, one wonders, reflecting upon the history of persecution, be tolerance without indifference?

Now indifference in regard to objects is a function of material sufficiency—it is easy for the inheritor of a fortune to descant upon the unimportance of material possessions—and indifference in regard to others' beliefs is the by-product of scepticism. It follows that ages of growing material prosperity and diminishing spiritual intensity would seem to qualify for the title of decadent. One thinks in this connection of our own Edwardian age covering the first ten years of this century as an eligible candidate. Yet how supremely pleasant for the middle and upper classes that age was—so pleasant that, to those of us who can just remember it, it seems in retrospect a golden age of comfort and amenity.

Many would consider the title of decadent to be applicable to the years that immediately followed the 1914–18 war.

<sup>1</sup>A propagandist Socialist.

<sup>2</sup>A mystic.

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

### *Our Own Age*

And then a curious thing happens. At the height of our enjoyment of the putatively decadent Edwardian age and the even more obviously decadent 'twenties, without any marked period of transition we find ourselves to our consternation living in an entirely different age, an age which exhibits many of the characteristics historically associated with young societies, namely, vigour, crudity, zeal and discomfort, an age of fanatically held beliefs and proselytizing endeavour which does not shrink from ruthless cruelty to opponents and sceptics. Once again, men have felt so assured of the truth of certain propositions, have been so deeply convinced of the importance of believing in them, that they have been prepared to die on their behalf and to kill or torture those who maintain the truth of contrary propositions. During the last twenty-five years the Western world has been swept by a tornado of energy let loose by the inspiring myths of Communism and Fascism. More characteristic, perhaps, than either, since these after all are held only by sections of the Western world, is the creed of Nationalism to which practically the whole of the contemporary world subscribes.

### *The Religious Delusion of the Past*

Looking back upon an age from the vantage point of a later century, it is easy to be wise after its events ; easy, for example, to see the folly and the wickedness of the beliefs which underlay the religious wars that devastated Europe for nearly a thousand years.

We take it now, I suppose, almost for granted that you cannot persuade a man of spiritual truth by inflicting gross physical agony upon his body ; nor do we any longer suppose that the most effective method of converting a man to belief in Him who bade His followers love one another is to rack his limbs or to roast his flesh. Yet how universal was the persuasion, how intense the conviction that religious truth was known and that all men ought to be made to embrace it after a particular manner, may be deduced from the ardours and endurances that men underwent,

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

the risks they ran, the pains they suffered, in order that they might be free to worship God in their own way. For example, in the early fifteenth century, the Bohemian Taborites felt convinced—and the circumstances of the time afforded every justification for this conviction—that only by force of arms could they secure the right to worship God and order their Church in the way which seemed good to them. In the strength of this conviction, first under Ziska and later under Procopius the Great, they fought for twelve years against the combined strength of the Holy Roman Empire, withstood five fierce crusades, routed the Imperial armies and devastated a large area of Germany.

The inscription upon the monument to the Pilgrim Fathers at Plymouth, Mass., telling how they achieved their own freedom of worship, affords a commentary upon both the strength and the transitoriness of human delusions; for who would now wish to prevent them?

We, I repeat, take it for granted that the spirit cannot be constrained by the coercion of the body, but at the time when the delusion flourished how few, how very few—Montaigne was one, Erasmus, possibly, was another—realized what seems to us so obvious now.

Meanwhile, I note in passing that, while the behaviour of the Taborites and the Pilgrim Fathers was emphatically non-decadent, it may be doubted whether the intensity of their convictions conduced to the agreeableness of existence in fifteenth-century Bohemia or in early seventeenth-century Massachusetts.

### *The Nationalist Delusion of the Present*

To me, it seems probable that the myths associated with Nationalism will appear to our posterity as foolish, as wicked and as destructive of human happiness as the beliefs which gave rise to the wars of religion now seem to us. Just as those wars arose from false beliefs about the nature of the spirit and of God, to wit that the former could be coerced by forcing the body and that the latter approved of the process, so our wars arise from a false belief about the nature of the State.

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

### *The Alleged Amorality of States*

This is the belief that there is some peculiar characteristic, some special sanctity about national States, such that, whereas all other human organizations and institutions are subject to a moral law which they are required to observe and which they not infrequently do observe, States and States alone are exempt from this law and not only are but must be influenced in their policies only by self-seeking motive.<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'must be' indicates that there is something in the nature of States or conceivably of things in general which makes it inevitable that this attribute, which in the past has almost invariably characterized the practice of States, will always continue to characterize their practice; that the assertion, 'States pursue power and only power', is not merely an empirical generalization about the way in which States do behave and have behaved but a universal law governing the way in which they must behave.

It follows from this belief that it is at best woolly-minded idealism and at worst treason to suppose that moral considerations, to which human beings and other human organizations except this one organization are sometimes subject, can ever be made applicable to the relations of States.

And the greater the State, the greater the impossibility of their application. The major interests of Great Powers are, therefore, thought to be in a quite special degree exempt from morality.

This belief is in our time all-pervasive. It dominates the work of most writers on international affairs; the books and articles of so eminent and characteristic a writer as E. H. Carr, for example, implicitly assume and never question it. It inspires the practice of statesmen. Under the influence of this belief we prepared for and fought the war of 1914-18; under the influence of the same belief Hitler prepared for the war of 1939-45; under the same influence Stalin, Truman and Churchill sent their delegates to San Francisco with the object of constructing an international power system which would leave the Great Powers as free in the future to pursue

<sup>1</sup> I have devoted a later chapter, chapter xiii, to the causes, nature and effects of power-worship by States.

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

their own national interests as they had been in the past, thus laying the foundations of future war.

For wars, it is obvious, there must be, so long as States remain sovereign and anarchic, and States will remain sovereign and anarchic so long as this belief about their peculiar nature persists and by its persistence frustrates any attempt to curtail their power or to subject them to moral law. Because of the belief, young men and women in all countries of Western Europe are trained to kill and induced to die on behalf of the real or fancied interests of the particular State to which they happen to belong, while education is often little more than a training in State patriotism designed to prepare the mind for the unquestioning acceptance of the State's commands and the body for conscription in the service of the State's policies.

Now for this belief, the belief, namely, that exemption from moral considerations is a necessary attribute of the State's nature, there is, as far as I can see, no evidence at all. There is no necessary reason why the relations of a stronger State with its weaker neighbour must be determined by a will to power backed by force, any more than there is a necessary reason why a strong man should invariably exert his will and employ his superior strength to determine his relations with a weak man, a woman or a child. States, after all, are composed of human beings and human beings are mixed. Partly good and partly bad, they do at least on occasion act morally. Hence, there can be no law of nature why States which, I repeat, are composed of human beings and whose policies are directed by the motives of human beings should not *sometimes* do the same. Nevertheless, our theories about State policy and our expectations in regard to State practice are based upon the implied assumption that they never will do the same. As men think, so do they act, and it is partly because of the widespread prevalence of this belief in regard to the nature of States that the belief is almost invariably confirmed by their practice.

For all that, I suspect that the historian of three hundred years hence, if such there be, looking back upon our age, will regard this belief as our characteristic illusion, an illusion whose patent falsity will make it appear as incomprehensible to him as the

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

illusion which devastated Europe with the wars of religion now seems to us.

### *Summary of Considerations Touching the Disagreeableness of Non-Decadent Ages*

Partly because of this illusion, there can, I think, be little doubt that, except for the poor, our own age is relatively disagreeable to live in; so disagreeable, that to late middle-aged survivors from the Edwardian age the world in which they were brought up seems, as I have remarked, to have been a golden age of security, decency, dignity and peace. In this connection it is relevant to reflect upon the implications of the vogue of Trollope's novels. . . .

The disagreeableness of our age is largely, though not wholly, the result of the prevalence of war. War, in the modern world, is largely the offspring of strongly held beliefs, belief in Communism, belief in Fascism, belief above all in the sovereignty of national States and their exemption from moral obligations. Now belief backed by a degree of conviction which equates disagreement with sin is conventionally regarded as an attribute of non-decadent ages. It is, for example, usually associated with certain virtues, courage—certain things are worth fighting for and killing for—self-sacrifice—certain things are worth suffering for and dying for—loyalty to certain institutions, persons, organizations, causes, and creeds—we must at all costs be true to our faith, loyal to our Leader, refrain from letting our side down, etc.—discipline—in their service we must, if needs be, live hard, enduring and aspiring lives, do what we are told, go short—and faith—there are certain things which are beyond reason and are matters of cherished, unassailable, individual conviction, for example, the truth of the creed, the worthwhileness of the institution, the inspirational inerrancy of the Leader. Consider, for example, the following remarks in praise of the specifically non-decadent virtues by Fascist statesmen and writers:

‘For me, violence is perfectly moral, more moral than compromise. War is to man as motherhood is to woman.’—Mussolini.

‘A new world has come into being for which war is frankly a postulate, the measure of all things and in which the soldier lays

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

down the law and rules the roost . . . every human and social activity is justified only when it aids preparation for war.'—*Deutsche Wehr*, the professional journal of Hitler's Officer Corps.

'War is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of man.'—Ruskin.

'Nations living in eternal peace lose manliness.'—Dr. Ley.

'We must smash up the organization of security and insurance. . . . Then and not till then will life be strong and simple again . . . what is called barbarism is the power of life renewing itself.'—Heinrich Hauser.

Now it cannot, I think, be doubted that these virtues and values, admirable as their possession may be in times of emergency, are, to put it mildly, hard to live with. Fanatics, leaders and heroes are notoriously difficult company in quiet times—one would not, for example, choose them for companions on a country walk or for a day in a punt on the river. But fanatics, heroes and leaders are non-decadent persons, the beliefs to which I have referred are non-decadent beliefs and the virtues which they call forth, non-decadent virtues.

I have dwelt designedly upon the so-called *virtues* of non-decadent ages. Their *vices* are too obvious to call for comment. Among the most important are pedantry and superstition in the intellectuals, ignorance and credulity in the governed, cruelty, ruthlessness and violence in the governors. I conclude that not only is there no evidence for the proposition that decadent ages are necessarily disagreeable to live in, but there is some evidence for the contrary proposition that non-decadent ages are disagreeable to live in. In support of this view I cite from H. A. L. Fisher's *A History of Europe* the following comment on the Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Europe that was ushered in by the emphatically non-decadent age of the Reformation: 'A Chinaman of the period, had he been in a position to survey the turbulent European scene during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, might well have asked himself whether the art of living was not better understood by a people which had no religious quarrels because they had no religion but only an ethical code of deportment, whether the vast liberation of human forces brought about by the Protestant Reformation with all its infinite



## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

consequences for art and music, science and letters, was worth the price of long and savage wars, and whether an attitude of mind towards the ultimate mysteries less aspiring, less heroic and less confident than that which prevailed among Western Christians was not in effect more conducive to human comfort.'

### *Decadent Ages and Creative Fertility*

If the superior agreeableness of non-decadent ages is difficult to establish, the question may next be raised whether their claim to greater artistic and literary fertility is more securely based. This claim is, indeed, often made and in face of the difficulty of establishing agreed examples of a decadent age or decadent art, is often conceded by default. For my part, I do not think that it is ever easy to establish correlations between forms of art and types of society. Nevertheless, I would venture to put forward three considerations which bear upon the issue.

## 1. THE RELATION BETWEEN FIRST-RATE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC WORK AND ENVIRONMENT

Some degree of freedom from insecurity, fear, grinding toil and want are necessary, if great work is to be done in the sphere of art. I know, of course, that in vigorous ages, which have also been ages of insecurity and violence, great work has often been produced. Homer and Aeschylus, Chaucer and Cervantes, Giotto, Montaigne and Milton, not to speak of the architects and builders of the cathedrals of the early Middle Ages, are obvious examples which I take at random. Yet the suggestion they convey is misleading. (a) It is rarely the case that the artist or writer at the time when he is doing his own best work is himself subject to insecurity, fear and want. (b) There is obviously a limit to the extent to which art and literature can flourish in such circumstances; art does not, for example, flourish in slave compounds and neither books or music came out of German concentration camps. (c) In regard to music which is the most essentially

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

'artistic' of the arts, it is, I think, no accident that the circumstances of time and place in which it was produced have been on the whole secure and agreeable. I do not forget that Mozart and Schubert in particular were harassed by debt, that Schumann led an agitated and poverty-stricken life, that Chopin was often unhappy, that Beethoven wrote his greatest quartets when deaf and so on. But their worries were *personal* worries; it was not by public vicissitudes that their lives were harassed.

Nor is the circumstance that so high a proportion of the world's great music should have been produced in a comparatively small area of central Europe—central and southern Germany and Austria—in a short period of a hundred and fifty years of comparative peace and prosperity without its significance. Bach, Handel and Domenico Scarlatti were born in 1685, Haydn in 1732, Mozart in 1756, Beethoven in 1770, Schubert in 1797. Schubert's last work was composed in 1828, the year of his death. For my part, I should care very little if all the music written before and after this period were never heard again. Now, this was an age of small courts, supporting a comparatively leisured aristocracy, leading peaceful lives in easy circumstances. Such wars as occurred were conducted largely by professional soldiers and made little impact upon the life of the times.

## 2. THE ENVIRONMENT SUITABLE TO THE PRODUCTION OF FIRST-RATE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC WORK

### (a) *General Considerations.*

Freedom from want and insecurity, though important, is not sufficient if the writer or artist is to do his best work; he needs also the company of those who share his interests and his tastes. The ideal environment is in general provided by a small urban community, where artists, writers and critics are in the habit of meeting to discuss the problems of their profession and the work of their contemporaries. Such an environment keeps the writer up to scratch, provides a standard by which he can measure the

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

value of his work, prunes exuberance and discourages eccentricity.<sup>1</sup> Some of these conditions prevailed in our own country in the late sixteenth century, when England first settled down after the dreary squabbling of the Wars of the Roses and an urban civilization began to form, with London as its cultural centre. As a result, a number of dramatists of a very high order, Massinger and Marlowe and Webster and Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson provided the environment in which Shakespeare, a man of genius, could come to his full stature. They prevailed again in the eighteenth century when a society of serious and cultivated men who cared for letters maintained for over a century a continuous critical environment, in which such writers as Gibbon, Hume, Sterne, Smollett, Richardson, Fielding, Boswell and Pope, inheritors of the vigour and forthrightness of an earlier age, observed those classical virtues of poise, measure, taste, elegance and clarity associated with a mature one.

The names I have mentioned evoke and commemorate the achievement of the eighteenth century. These men enjoyed as their inheritance the most cultivated environment that this country has known. Between them they provided some of the most glorious pages of English literature. Yet the virtues of their work are indubitably social; they bear upon them in a high degree the stamp of their environment, the environment of a small highly cultivated community. Lacking such an environment—and it is rarely that in England it has prevailed—the writer is apt to grow eccentric and odd. I have read<sup>2</sup> that the superior taste and elegance of the French as compared with the English literary tradition—I am not speaking here of the work of the greatest men—is due precisely to the satisfaction of this environmental condition in French, but not in English society. The French writer growing up in an atmosphere friendly to the arts can come to his full stature, such as it is, without the violent effort at adaptation which the English intellectual must make and the vigorous antagonisms which he must seek to overcome. It is with the English artist and writer as with a plant in an exposed situation. Only the strongest survive but they are often twisted in the struggle just as a tree, exposed to

<sup>1</sup> This theme is developed in chapter xiv, pp. 353–6.

<sup>2</sup> In Clive Bell's great book, *Civilization*.

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

the continuous blast of hostile winds, grows sturdy and vigorous albeit warped and twisted. It is no accident that so many English writers have been English eccentrics and that even in the greatest there is a strain of waywardness. Good English writers are either angry and rebellious, like Swift, or quaint, like the author of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, or whimsical like Lear, or gipsyish like Borrow. Their virtues are rarely those which are traditionally associated with the great writer. Emphatically theirs are not the classical virtues of grace, poise, serenity, measure, proportion or even, with the notable exception of Swift, of clarity. This waywardness is, I am suggesting, an inevitable consequence of the pertinacious practice of letters in an environment in which the characteristic appellation for a man who seeks to live the life of the mind and of the spirit in any of its forms is 'highbrow', and the characteristic epithet for the denomination of the type is 'brainy'.

Now, I do not want to suggest that the cultivated environment which I have described, the environment of the eighteenth century, is a characteristic of decadent ages, but I do wish to suggest that its opposite is a frequent characteristic of ages which are not.

Let me bring these observations to a point or rather to three points.

(i) Most good work in the arts is the product of a cultivated and informed environment; it proceeds, in short, from a school.

(ii) In the absence of such an environment, only the greatest will establish themselves and they will tend to become warped and twisted by the struggle. Even so, the greatest are more likely to proceed from a school, as Bach did—everybody in Bach's environment was writing and talking music—or the Italian painters of the Renaissance, than to emerge from the fields, the slums or the wilderness. Just as you rarely find big mountains without a girdle of foothills, so where many are doing good work, the chances that one or more will be found to be doing great work are increased.

(iii) I am speaking here only of the general run of good, serious workers in the arts. I am not, that is to say, speaking of the very great, of Shakespeare, Homer, Beethoven, Mozart, Rembrandt, Vermeer, who subject to the limitations indicated in (1) (b)<sup>1</sup> above seem to be capable of working under any conditions. Equally, of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 84.

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

course, I am not speaking of hack writers, who write, paint or compose *only* for money. Nevertheless, it is, I take it, a fact that whatever the motives that first lead a writer or an artist to adopt his profession, many of them even among the greatest will be found sooner or later to be turning out not the goods which they wish to produce but the goods for which the world is prepared to pay, in order that they in their turn may pay what Stevenson called 'the butcher boy'. Work produced under this compulsion must also, in general, be excluded from these generalizations.

### *(b) Personal Observations*

These observations are couched in general terms. Let me try to illustrate them by some reflections drawn from my own experience. Throughout my life I have lived in England, a country which, as I have remarked, is comparatively indifferent to writers, and during most of it in an age which is relatively barbarous. Prior to 1914, England was comparatively civilized. (I regret that I cannot avoid begging the question I am supposed to be discussing by the interim use of such words as 'civilized' and 'barbarous'.) Since 1914 it has, I think, grown increasingly impervious to the life of the mind and of the spirit, while since 1939 we have lived in an Iron Age. (These dogmatisms must be pardoned here. I hope to give grounds for them later.<sup>1</sup>) It is no doubt partly for this reason that so many of the writers I have known have taken to living in the country. (Parenthetically, I have sometimes wondered whether the abundance and variety of our nature literature, the most abundant and the most varied in any language, may not be in part due to the fact that so many English writers have been driven by the cultural austerity of the environment of the towns to retreat into the country, the influence of which sooner or later seeped into their work and deflected their interests. It is odd how few of our nature writers have been countrymen bred and born. Clare, the Northamptonshire poet, was a countryman, so was William Barnes the Dorsetshire poet, so were Hardy and Richard Jefferies; but most of those who have hymned the joys of the country were especially in the eighteenth century men of the town.)

<sup>1</sup>See especially chapters xi and xii.

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

### *The Writer in the Country*

Whatever the reason for the exodus, so many writers do, in fact, go 'out of town' that it has become almost an accepted thing among us that the country is the place in which to do one's serious writing. It is the more unfortunate that in retiring to it the writer inevitably cuts himself off from the life of the community to which he naturally belongs and substitutes a society of country persons both gentle and simple for that of his peers. The southern counties of England are dotted with the 'country cottages' of cultivated and literary persons. The man writes or paints and drinks manful pints with silent labourers in bar parlours or, worse, seeks to jolly them into an unnatural animation. The wife with inadequate and reluctant help toils distressfully at the oil stove to give the husband the kind of meals to which he and she have been accustomed in town. Or she takes up some piece of social work or attends the Women's Institute. . . . Neither makes contact with their kind except at week-ends, when they invite their friends from town and exhaust and impoverish themselves in the effort to entertain them.

Having thus surrounded himself with a social and intellectual vacuum, the man proceeds to write. If he is a genius, well and good; it may be that freedom from interruption is the only demand that he need make upon his environment; his material he can spin from his own vitals. But for the ordinary man of letters who is more or less talented but not more than talented the procedure is, I suggest, ill-advised. It suffers from four drawbacks: (i) a writer requires fairly continuous and varied experience of the right kind, if he is to be fertile and become fruitful. His self, in other words, needs to be crossed from time to time with the not-self in order that it may bring forth plentifully and abundantly. As William James puts it, 'A soul cannot fully become itself without knowing and to some extent being what isn't itself', 'what isn't itself' consisting in the case of the writer or the artist at least in part of the ideas, criticism and discussion of other men of his own kind. The man who removes himself from his natural environment cuts the roots through which he should draw nourishment. Hence his work tends to become remote, in the sense that

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

it is no longer concerned with the matters that concern his society, and dry because he lacks fertilising contacts. Or it is frankly escapist; he writes about fauns or boys who don't grow up, or he idealises children, or he writes brightly about nature, or he takes refuge in whimsy or 'romance'. (ii) Lacking the spur of discussion with men of similar interests and equal intelligence, he suffers from lack of criticism. Criticism prunes a man's work, keeps him from straying too far from the middle of the road and opens his ears to the still small voice that in the middle of the night whispers, 'Fiddlesticks'. (iii) Because of the emptiness of his life, the writer is drawn sometimes against his will to share in the concerns of his immediate environment. The natural interests that belong to a country life begin to engage him. Are the vegetables in the garden ready for digging, or the fruit for picking? When is he to go for his walk and when to work in the garden? Presently, it may be, he adventures on a horse or essays the shooting of rabbits or the catching of fish. Gradually these interests gain in importance and begin to fill the empty spaces of his life. Now all these, no doubt, are very good things, but they are not the things that he meant to do, still less the things that he meant to write about and emphatically they do not, except for those who are born to them, provide material or stimulus for good writing.

(iv) The writer is, moreover, unduly pressed especially in our own time by the common cares of existence, which in the country are more insistent than in the town. Housework has to be done, fires lit, the walls whitewashed, nails knocked in, the dishes washed up. And the man must do his share, attending to the engine which makes, how inadequately, the electric light, endeavouring to stimulate the failing pump, to cope with the sulky car, a hewer of wood and a fetcher of water. In a word, he gradually drops the attributes and concerns of the 'intellectual' and assumes those of the peasant; and in the evening, like the peasant, he is usually very tired. He smokes his pipe, nods over his book and wants to go to bed.

Speaking from my own experience, I record that I have always found it harder to write in the country than in the environment of London. In the country it is harder to sit down and begin; there don't seem to be so many things to say and one has to stop to

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

think how to say them; one writes dully and platitudinously; the kick and point go out of one's sentences; the appropriate phrase no longer presents itself unsought. Dull work, routine work, hard work and hack work—all these can be done well enough; but work that calls for the fine edge of one's faculties had better wait until one returns to the town and the stimulus of the town's talk. I would, then, interpret in a very literal sense Flaubert's remark, '*L'art est un luxe; il veut des mains blanches et calmes.*'

To sum up, good literary and artistic work of any kind is more easily done under urban conditions or where urban conditions are at least available. It demands an educated, critical environment of like-minded men and women sheltered from the more obvious preoccupations of the savage, the manual labourer, the handyman, the mechanic and the gangster. These conditions, I also suggest, are favourable but not necessary to the greatest work.

Historically, the ages which have provided this environment have often been called decadent. Those in which it is lacking are called young, vigorous, vital, purposeful, progressive but emphatically not decadent.

### 3. THE ENVIRONMENT SUITABLE TO THE APPRECIATION OF FIRST-RATE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC WORK

If this is true of the production, it is no less true of the critical appreciation and enjoyment of art. Though great works have often been written in ages of violence, their full appreciation has had to wait for ages of stability and leisure. Let me again call to witness the period in our own history in which literature was most honoured, in which criticism was most pointed and appreciation most informed, the age of the eighteenth century. This was pre-eminently a period of calm and peace, a period of which G. M. Trevelyan in his *English Social History* writes: 'The gods mercifully gave mankind this little moment of peace between the religious fanaticisms of the past and the fanaticisms of class and race that were speedily to arise and dominate time to come.' As a result, there emerged an age with—I am still quoting Trevelyan—'a



## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

mental outlook of its own, self-poised, self-judged, and self-approved, freed from the disturbing passions of the past, and not yet troubled with anxieties about a very different future which was soon to be brought upon the scene by the Industrial and the French Revolutions'. This was the age to which Lytton Strachey, in a well-known essay on Pope, refers as 'perhaps the most civilized that our history has known. Never at any rate, before or since, has literature been so respected in England. Prior wrote well, and he became an ambassador. Addison wrote well, and he was made a Secretary of State. The Duke of Wharton gave Young £2,000 for having written a poem on the Universal Passion. Alderman Barber's great ambition was to be mentioned favourably by Pope. He let it be understood that he would be willing to part with £4,000 if the poet would gratify him; a single couplet was all he asked for; but the Alderman begged in vain. On the other hand, Pope accepted £1,000 from the old Duchess of Marlborough in return for the suppression of an attack upon the late Duke'. Strachey adds that Pope's *Translation of Homer* brought him in £9,000, a sum equivalent to £40,000 at the present time. Now, these conditions, the conditions in which literature and art have been honoured and adequately recompensed, have recurred several times in the world's history; in late fifth and early fourth-century Athens B.C., in the second century A.D. of the Roman Empire, in France in the time of Louis XV and, no doubt, in many periods during the long history of China. These are ages of security, when a civilization has outgrown the agitations of its violent youth and has settled down for a time into a more or less stable mould. During the last half of the eighteenth century the mould was beginning to crack, the harmonious civilization which Dr. Johnson and his friends enjoyed was gradually dissolving, the rule of good taste, good manners, good sense and moderation was almost over and the age that honoured them was displaced by one that valued virtues of a very different order, virtues more ambitious and less comfortable. Yet Hume, Gibbon and Voltaire all write as if they thought that the eighteenth-century life, as they knew it, would continue for ever. There is no suggestion in their writings of the coming of the French Revolution, no hint that their world is shortly to be transformed by the industrial revolution. The

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

destruction of serenity and peace by the coming of iron and coal and the conquest of nature by machinery were as little anticipated as the destruction of the French monarchy by the coming of the French Revolution and the conquest of Europe by Napoleon.

These ages of comparative stability and security are not necessarily the ages in which works of the highest level are produced. But they are ages of high civility in which a predominantly urban civilization, an appreciable proportion of whose members live lives of leisured amenity, maintains an environment of cultivated and critical taste in which not only the masterpieces of the past but the productions of the present are discussed, sifted, tested and approved. Now from many points of view these ages might be and have been called decadent, if only because they so often precede periods of break-up and collapse.

### *Conclusions on Decadence and Taste*

My conclusion is that decadent rather than non-decadent ages tend to provide the most suitable environment for the appreciation and enjoyment of high-level literary and artistic work. Non-decadent ages tend to lack taste. '*Quel ton! Quel effroyable ton!*' said Madame Du Deffand when confronted with a copy of the Old Testament. It is difficult to resist the belief that the decline in the appreciation, no less than in the production of great work in our own age, is not unconnected with the agitations of the world in which for thirty years we have lived. War and the threat of war casts its shadow over men's lives. How can a man think, let alone dream, when the hills and valleys are filled with the echoes of marching feet? How can he command the serenity to conceive or the patience to create beautiful things, when he contemplates the prospect of those whom he loves being burnt, blinded or dismembered and the fruits of his effort being scattered with the ashes of the civilization that gave it birth? The creative artist demands a quiet background, if he is to produce his best work; he also requires an audience whose release from the more primitive preoccupations of the savage and the gangster enables men to turn their attention to the products of the spirit. He

## AGREEABLENESS OF DECADENT AGES

demands in fact a civilized environment, alert, interested, reasonably secure. Under the stresses and fears of our time such an environment is fast disappearing from the Europe of today, and, as a result, the interest of civilized people in the productions of the human spirit declines. For most of us the film has taken the place of the drama, the radio usurped the function of the book. It is not without significance that in the years between the two wars the number of visitors to the National and the Tate Galleries declined,<sup>1</sup> while the number of visitors to the Natural History Museum in South Kensington increased.

I conclude that whatever may be the case in regard to production, a violent, fighting and frightened age does not afford the optimum conditions for the appreciation of great art.

<sup>1</sup> Figures are given in Part II chapter xi, p. 261.

## CHAPTER IV

### Proposed Definition of Decadence

#### *A Proposed Definition*

So much having been said in a preliminary way about decadent and non-decadent art and decadent and non-decadent ages, a number of definitions of decadence having been rejected and a number of common conceptions as, for example, that decadent ages are necessarily disagreeable, non-decadent ages necessarily agreeable, to live in, or that decadent art is necessarily or even usually bad, having been explored and shown to be misconceptions, it is time to consider what the true meaning of decadence may be. For there is, I think, such a meaning, a meaning which is common to, though perhaps not always distinctive of, the many expressions of the life both of individuals and of societies, of thought and of art to which the name 'decadent' is applied. If I were to try to convey this meaning in a sentence, it is, I should say, to be found in the view that experience is valuable or is at least to be valued for its own sake, irrespective of the quality or kind of the experience, and in the appropriate beliefs about life, morals, art and society which entail and are entailed by this view, together with the scales of values and modes of taste associated with these beliefs.

#### *Walter Pater's Statement*

A well-known modern statement of this view is that of Walter Pater. It occurs in the Epilogue to his book, *The Renaissance*, which, he tells us, 'was omitted in the second edition . . . as I conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall'. The view is summarized in the

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

sentence 'not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end'.

The view is associated with and is at least in part based upon the acceptance of a Heracleitean metaphysic. This has since been rendered familiar by Bergson's ingenious and persuasive statement of a similar view. The universe is all of a piece, being in fact a continuous flow of change. Everything is in a state of flux and there is nothing fixed or permanent. In an eloquent passage Pater develops this view, reducing the actual to 'a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves'. Pater concludes that, since everything changes and dissolves under our touch, wisdom consists in making the most of the moment as it passes, and bids us grasp and enjoy as many moments of exquisite experience as we can contrive. 'To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is,' he says, 'success in life.'

If everything is changing, it follows that there is no absolute truth, no absolute standard of morality, no absolute beauty, no timeless deity. There is, in fact, nothing other than the flux of our experience; or, if there is, we cannot know it. Hence, we are bidden to concentrate on experience and experience alone as the end.

I propose, first, to say something about the circumstances which are favourable to this view; secondly, to indicate the beliefs, modes and practices in thought, art and conduct in which it naturally finds expression. In the next chapter I shall consider and criticize its wider and more specifically philosophical implications.

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

### 1. CIRCUMSTANCES FAVOURABLE TO THE VIEW UNDER DISCUSSION

The circumstances which are favourable to this view are not, I think, difficult to discern. Let us begin by postulating a long period of strife and violence in which the qualities necessary to survival, toughness, loyalty, discipline, courage, ruthlessness and herd cohesiveness have been at a premium.

One thinks of the wars which ushered in the Roman Empire or of the religious wars of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The period comes to an end and is succeeded by one of comparative tranquillity. Life no longer holds or holds in lesser measure its moments of extravagant triumph, of thrilling joy, of searing pain or agonized fear. There is also a weakening of belief in creeds and causes, for where it is no longer necessary to suffer and die and, we may add, to kill for creed or cause, the one is no longer embraced, the other no longer advocated with the same passionate intensity and fanatic zeal. We have arrived, we will suppose, at the second and third centuries A.D. of the Roman Empire or are living in England towards the end of the nineteenth century. Life in these periods is pleasant but apt to be a little flat. The senses can be gratified, the understanding exercised without let or hindrance, but the spirit flags. Presently lassitude supervenes.

Fatiguing to those who follow it, the tedium of this mode of existence is sometimes communicated to those who later contemplate it. This way of life, pushed to its logical conclusion, says Matthew Arnold contemplating the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, by reason of 'the very intensity and unremittingness of its appeal to the senses and the understanding, by its stimulating a single side of us too absolutely, ends by fatiguing and revolting us; and by leaving us with a sense of confinement, of oppression—with a desire for utter change, for clouds, storms, effusion and relief'.

That is it; one is coming to the end of a long, sultry July evening and, to escape the oppression, one does one of two things. Because

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

experience is apt to be a little flat one professes an exaggerated admiration for those experiences which are intense. Herein lies the essence of Romanticism which is, I suggest, to be identified with the glorification of passion and emotion, of *every* passion, *every* emotion.<sup>1</sup> From this it is only a step to the admiration of the *life* which consists of intense emotion. Now, danger is the best recipe for the production of intense emotion; hence, because life in such times is not exciting, one demands that it should be made exciting through danger, and we come to the cult of the Nietzschean superman and Carlylean 'hero'. At the end of the long nineteenth-century peace men like Henley and Ruskin are found to be trumpeting the virtues of war. 'War,' wrote Ruskin, 'is the foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men'; or—a milder form of the same complaint—they preach like Stevenson the strenuous life and sing the praises of cold baths and walking tours.

In the nineteenth century this attitude, which is the natural by-product of quiet times, was confined to literary men; but the literary attitudes of one generation have a habit of becoming the accepted modes of the next. Thus, Professor Gilbert Murray, who identifies<sup>2</sup> 'Romanticism' with 'the glorification of passion—any passion—just because it is violent, overwhelming, unreasonable', goes on to point out that 'what seems to have happened is that this "romanticism" which had its place in art, and was mostly confined to small artistic circles has burst out into real life and, in country after country, taken possession of the common man. What was an interesting speculation among intellectuals has become to the unthinking a dogma and an inspiration'.

Failing intense experience, one tries by an act of volition to invest the mere process of living with the zest that circumstance fails to provide. Experience itself is an adventure, one says; every

<sup>1</sup>Since this passage was written I have found the expression of a similar view in Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 19. He puts it thus:

'The romantic movement, in art, in literature, and in politics, is bound up with this subjective way of judging men, not as members of a community, but as aesthetically delightful objects of contemplation. Tigers are more beautiful than sheep, but we prefer them behind bars. The typical romantic removes the bars and enjoys the magnificent leaps with which the tiger annihilates the sheep.'

<sup>2</sup>In an article entitled 'Romanticism and Reason', in the *Rationalist Annual* for 1947.

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

moment of it, if life be rightly lived, can be made significant, every act has importance, has even, some have averred, an equal importance. If we try hard enough, we can all of us learn 'to burn continuously' with Pater's 'hard gem-like flame'. Even the floor can be 'swept for the glory of God.' . . .

Listen, for example, to Virginia Woolf, telling us what she takes to be the proper interest of the novelist:

'Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? . . . It is, at any rate, in some such fashion as this that we seek to define the quality which distinguishes the work of several young writers, among whom Mr. James Joyce is the most notable from that of their predecessors. They attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist. *Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall. Let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.*'<sup>1</sup>

In this passage Walter Pater's concept of the value—perhaps 'significance' is the right word—of experience as such is endorsed and illustrated. It is even pronounced to be the duty of the novelist to render experience as such.

## 2. SOME ASSOCIATED BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, VALUES AND TASTES

I pass from the circumstances favourable to the view under discussion to some of the beliefs, attitudes and practices associated with it.

<sup>1</sup> From an essay on Modern Fiction in *The Common Reader*, First Series. My italics.



## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

If experience is an end in itself, and if, further, all experience is significant, it is difficult to see how any obligation can be laid upon us to seek one kind of experience rather than another. The view further demands the abandonment of the notion that we are here for a purpose and that our lives should be lived in fulfilment of that purpose, the notion, in short, that life is a pilgrimage, for a pilgrimage implies a goal and there can be no pilgrimage in search of it, unless there is a goal to seek. Hence, the view that experience is the end tends to be associated with (1) Scepticism in belief; (2) Epicureanism and Hedonism in conduct; (3) Subjectivism in thought, art and morals. I propose to say something about each of these.

### *(1) Scepticism in Belief*

The absence of strong, religious belief is a familiar characteristic of so-called decadent ages; of fourth century B.C. Greece, of fourth century A.D. Rome and of eighteenth century France. I will endeavour to trace the connection between lack of belief and the definition of decadence that I have suggested, showing how the latter both follows from and reinforces the former.

Let us suppose that the universe is without meaning or purpose or, alternatively, that although it may have both, it is impossible for the human mind to discover what they are. Let us suppose, further, that the natural order of spatio-temporal events in which we participate as the possessors of bodies is the only order of reality, or that, if there is another order of reality, we can have no contact with or knowledge of it.

Let us suppose, thirdly, that our minds are either the by-products of bodily and cerebral processes or that, though they may be other than the bodies which they animate, they are, nevertheless, permanently tied to and cannot exist without those bodies. Then it will follow that there can be no meaning in life save such as belongs to and derives from the order of reality which our bodies inhabit. It will also follow that there can be no ideals save such as the human mind has itself invented.

What, then, given these conclusions, will be meant by saying that an experience 'has value', or 'has beauty', or 'is significant'?

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

That having ourselves bestowed value upon it, or graced it with beauty, or invested it with significance, we then recognize it to possess the qualities and characteristics we have imputed to it.

Now there is in theory no reason why we should not perform this process of imputation upon any or all of our experiences and invest them all, if we are clever enough, or wise enough, or lucky enough, or have sufficiently mastered the art of living, with beauty, value or significance; in fact, we shall, on this view, have succeeded in life in proportion as we have contrived to invest our experience with the qualities and characteristics to which we give the names of 'significant' or 'intense' or 'beautiful' or 'valuable'. In so far, then, as we have contrived to import into our experiences the value which they do not and cannot derive from any external source—seeing that there is, after all, on this view, no external source whence they could derive it—we shall have succeeded in burning with the 'hard gem-like flame' recommended by Pater. The success of our lives will, then, be judged not by the degree to which they realize an end, achieve a goal, fulfil a purpose or conform to a standard which we have recognized as authoritative, but by the extent to which they contrive to embody a series of significant experiences. The impolite way of putting this is to say that such a life consists merely—but let Bruno Rontini from Huxley's *Time Must Have A Stop* put it impolitely for us—of 'one damned thing after another until at last there's a final damned thing, after which there isn't anything'. In this way it may be seen how the belief in experience for its own sake both reflects and supports a metaphysical scepticism.

### (2) *Epicureanism and Hedonism*

In the preceding paragraph I have used such words as 'beautiful', 'important' and 'significant' as epithets of experience, and have assumed that it is desirable that the qualities for which they are normally supposed to stand should characterize experience. But the question may be raised whether these words are anything but high sounding pseudonyms for 'pleasure' or whether, on the view we are considering, they can be. If there are sources of value in the world other than ourselves; if, for example, there is truth or beauty

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

or goodness or God, and if these things and this Person have worth in themselves, then it is intelligible that the experience of a mind which makes contact with them, whether in knowledge, in aesthetic appreciation, in the recognition and performance of duty or in the feelings of reverence and awe which deity evokes, should derive value from the nature of the objects which it contemplates and with which it makes contact, just as a body derives warmth from a fire or a plant nutriment from the sun. But if there are no such external sources of value, then whatever desirable qualities human experiences may seem to possess will either originate within ourselves, or if they come to us from without, originate in the experience of other persons with whom we are brought into contact. What sort of value is it that human minds create for themselves? It must, I suggest, be value of the kind which belongs to that order of being of which men's mind-animated bodies are members. Hence, to grade experience in terms of value is, on this view, to assess it in terms of the qualities with which mind-animated bodies belonging to the spatio-temporal order of reality and knowing no other order—for there is no other to know—are able to invest their experiences. Now these qualities, I would suggest, in so far as they can be said to have value, reduce themselves, on analysis, to the one quality of pleasurable-ness. 'Exhilarating,' we say of our experience, or 'thrilling' or 'transporting', or 'fine', or 'noble', or 'elevating', but is it, one wonders, *on this hypothesis*, possible to resist the reduction of these terms by the familiar hedonist analysis to various forms of *pleasurable-ness*. For these are all experiences which, in different ways and for different reasons, we enjoy and that in the long run is all that there is to be said about them. Hence, it is no accident that ages which value experience for its own sake because their beliefs—or, rather, lack of belief—have denied to the universe anything else to value, are pleasure-seeking ages which accept as the object of living the quest of pleasurable sensations without taking into account the sources from which they derive, the end for the sake of which they are pursued or any property which they may possess beyond the one property of pleasurable-ness. It is also to be expected that they should seek to develop, refine and enlarge the capacity for enjoying pleasurable sensations, that, in short, they should make

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

a cult of pleasure. The celebrated account of the 'democratic man' in the eighth book of Plato's *Republic* contains a picturesque summary of the type :

'He will not receive nor suffer within the ramparts the true reasoning of any one who asserts that some pleasures spring from the desires that are good and noble, but others from those that are evil, and that the former should be fostered and honoured, and the latter disciplined and enslaved. To all such remarks he shakes his head and says that all are alike and deserving of equal honour . . . And this is his life. Day after day he gratifies the pleasures as they come—now fluting down the primrose path of wine, now given over to teetotalism and banting; one day in hard training, the next slacking and idling, and the third playing the philosopher. Often he will take to politics, leap to his feet and do or say whatever comes into his head; or he conceives an admiration for a general, and his interests are in war; or for a man of business, and straightway that is his line. He knows no order or necessity in life; but he calls life as he conceives it pleasant and free and divinely blessed, and is ever faithful to it.'

In this extract I venture to draw attention both to the valuing of experience as such, 'he calls life as he conceives it pleasant and free and divinely blessed, and is ever faithful to it', and to the rating of all experiences, whatever their source, as of equal value provided that they are equally pleasurable—'to all such remarks he shakes his head and says that all are alike and deserving of equal honour'.

If I am right in my definition of decadence, it is no accident that the quest and cultivation of pleasure should have been noted as a characteristic of so-called decadent ages and decadent persons. To 'eat and drink for tomorrow we die' and to see to it that the eating and drinking are as elaborate and repaying as possible are, indeed, the only sensible rules of life, given a sceptical view of the universe and the attitude to experience which is its logical corollary. This is the creed of the sceptic, the epicurean and the hedonist in all ages, a creed which issues in Eustace Barnack's injunction : 'Never put off till tomorrow the pleasure you can enjoy today.'

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

### (3) *Subjectivism*

*The Common-Sense Analysis of Judgement.* Subjectivism is perhaps the most distinctive belief of our age, or more precisely, it is the philosophical attitude which underlies a number of its distinctive beliefs. In order that its relevance to my theme may be indicated, it is necessary to make a few preliminary remarks on theory of judgement.

A common-sense account of judgement would, I think, naturally distinguish three elements in a judgement : first, the person judging; secondly, the judgement passed; thirdly, some object about which the judgement is passed.

Thus, if I see a table and say that the table is hard, or is black, or is made of teak, or is two feet high, my judgements 'it is black', 'it is hard', 'it is made of teak', 'it is two feet high' would normally be said to be the expressions of mental acts whose purport and intention was to assert of the table that it possessed certain attributes, namely, those of blackness, hardness, being made of teak and being two feet high. My judgement might, of course, be mistaken; the table might only *look* black, or be made of rubber, or of deal, or be two feet one inch high, but the fact that it was false would not affect the purport of my judgement which is, on the common-sense view, to say something about an object, for example, that the object is of a certain class or is characterized by certain qualities; nor would it mean that it is never possible to say something about an object which is true.

The question of the nature of judgement is technical and difficult and I cannot follow this account further without becoming entangled in philosophical complexities. I am here endeavouring to keep as close to common sense as possible and it is sufficient for my purpose to point out that we do in ordinary life pass judgements, that these judgements refer to things other than ourselves, that they say something about these things and that it is at least possible that what they say may be true, that, in other words, something or other may really possess the qualities which the mind of the person judging attributes to it.

Let us call the person judging, the 'subject', and the something which the judgement is passed about, the 'object'. The purpose

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

of a judgement is, then, to say something about an 'object'. Now, though I have cited as an example of an 'object' a table, that is to say, a physical thing existing in space, there is no reason why the 'objects' which are judged should be limited to the class of physical things existing in space. The 'object' might be 'civilization', as when I judge that every civilization sooner or later declines and falls, or the Church, as when I judge that the Church will not in future play an important part in contemporary life, or the number 49.

Now there is from the standpoint of the present discussion at least one important difference between these abstract objects and between concrete, physical ones. The difference is that in the case of a judgement about a physical object, as, for example, the judgement 'this table is three feet high', I can sometimes check or verify the judgement by applying a standard of measurement, in the case in question a tape measure, and so establish its truth. Scientific knowledge consists of the whole body of verified judgements about physical facts. In the case of judgements about so-called 'abstract' objects no such experimental verification is possible. I may feel convinced that the judgement is true, I may even be able by reasoning and deductive argument to establish its truth to somebody else's satisfaction, but I cannot *verify* the judgement in any straightforward sense of the word, "verify", by checking it in order to see if it is or is not true, as when I consult a tape measure to check a judgement about the length of a physical object. There is, however, no reason in logic why a judgement about an 'abstract object' should not be true, in the sense of correctly reporting a fact about, or correctly asserting a characteristic of the 'object', even though its truth cannot be verified by experimental tests.

*Subjective Judgements.* Now, it is clear that the subject can make judgements about himself; he can say 'I feel giddy' or 'I feel sick', or 'I feel well', or 'I feel happy', or 'I am a sinner', or 'I am a hero', or 'I have the toothache', or 'I am subject to attacks of faintness'. In all these cases the 'object' is also the subject. These judgements, then, may be called subjective, because they are judgements *about* the subject. It is further clear that a number of judgements which purport to be about objects and are,

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

therefore, in form objective judgements are, in fact, at any rate partly about the subject. Judgements of taste belong pre-eminently to this class. Thus, if I say 'these gooseberries are sweet' and you say 'they are sour', most people would concede that our judgements are not doing what they purport to do, that is to say, making assertions about a quality possessed by the gooseberries in their own right independently of the persons judging. They would say that our judgements are reporting the effects produced by the gooseberries upon our respective palates and that, since our palates are in different conditions, the effects are different. Thus, these judgements should more accurately be phrased, 'I experience a sensation of sweetness when I taste the gooseberries', 'you experience a sensation of sourness when you taste the gooseberries'. Hence these two judgements which are objective in form turn out on analysis to be subjective in fact, being in fact judgements about feelings or sensations occurring in two different subjects.

(But even so, it would, I think, be admitted that the judgements do succeed in saying something about the gooseberries, even if all that they say is that the gooseberries are such as to be capable of producing different sensations in me and in you.)

At the other end of the scale, among judgements which are almost certainly objective, we may place mathematical judgements. Thus, nobody would wish to contend that the judgement seven plus five equals twelve, or the judgement  $a^2 - b^2 = (a + b)(a - b)$  report private fancies on the part of the subject. Almost everybody would agree that they do report relations subsisting between numbers and algebraical quantities, which relations would still subsist even if neither I nor anybody else were in a position to judge that they did.

*Subjectivist Analysis of Aesthetic and Moral Judgements.* Now, most aesthetic and moral judgements are couched in the objective form. 'This picture', we say, 'is beautiful', 'that sonata was well played', 'that action is right', 'that person's character good'. They are, however, capable of being analysed in such a way as to exhibit them as subjective in fact; when so analysed, they become respectively, 'I feel aesthetic pleasure in looking at this picture', or 'on hearing that sonata', 'I experience a feeling of

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

moral approval in contemplating that action', or 'that person's character'.

If this *is* the correct analysis then it follows: (1) that when we pass moral and aesthetic judgements we do not succeed in saying anything about the moral or aesthetic qualities of the 'object' to which the judgements purport to refer; (2) that no two aesthetic or moral judgements can disagree, since they are not, in fact, two differing judgements about the same 'object', one asserting that the 'object' has, the other that it has not a particular quality or attribute; they are judgements about different 'objects', since one of them reports the feelings or opinions of one judging subject, the other of another judging subject. (3) From this it is a short step to the assertion that 'objects' do not possess moral attributes and qualities in their own right, possess them, that is to say, independently of any judgements which may be passed about them. Indeed, if we cannot make any statement about their moral and aesthetic qualities since, whenever we try to do so, all we succeed in talking about are our own feelings and states of mind, it is only reasonable to conclude that the qualities which in every-day language we normally attribute to things do not, in fact, belong to them. If the qualities do belong to them, then we cannot, on this view, know or say anything about the qualities. Therefore, we cannot know or say truly that the qualities are the causes of the mental states which the two judges respectively experience and whose characteristics their judgements assert.

*Consequences of the Subjectivist Analysis of Judgement.* Now, subjectivist analyses of moral and aesthetic judgements on these lines are very popular, are, indeed, almost universal at the present time. They also have an important bearing on the theme of this chapter. In the foregoing discussion of Scepticism and Hedonism, I had occasion to point out that these doctrines frequently implied the non-existence or, at least, the non-knowability of 'objects' other than our own mental states. People are sceptical about the purpose, if any, of the universe because they do not believe that the human mind can have any knowledge of an order of being other than the space-time order. For the same reason, they deny that the mind can have knowledge of goals, purposes, ends and ideals other than those which it has itself generated. Even if it is



## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

theoretically possible that the mind could have such knowledge, it is quite certain, the sceptic says, that it does not, in fact, have it. Similarly, the hedonist asserts that pleasure is the only element or factor of value in our experience—if he does not explicitly say this, his position is, as I have suggested, reducible to it—precisely because he denies the existence of non-material qualities, for example, the quality of goodness in personal conduct or of beauty in ‘objects’ which might have bestowed desirable characteristics, other than the characteristic of pleasureableness, upon the experiences of those who observe them.

*The ‘Dropping of the Object’.* Thus, both Scepticism and Hedonism tend to belittle ‘the object’ and to concentrate upon the fact of human experience. Value, they maintain, in so far as it can be predicated of anything, can be validly predicated only of the qualities of human experience. A subjectivist attitude to art and morality which analyses apparently objective aesthetic and moral judgements on subjectivist lines is, therefore, naturally allied to Scepticism and Hedonism. Common to all three is the tendency to leave out ‘the object’.

This leaving out of ‘the object’ is an essential part of my definition of decadence; it is also a pervasive characteristic of the intellectual climate of our time.

*An Age Without Standards?* It is often charged against the present age that it lacks standards. To what does the charge amount? First, in the sphere of religion, that the generation which came to maturity in the years between the wars lacks a creed. Broadly, it holds no beliefs of any kind about the fundamental nature and government of the universe. It is not that it doubts—doubt, at least, implies interest; but the contemporary generation does not think about the matters which fall within the province of religion one way or the other. Secondly, in the sphere of morals that it has no code. When the foundations of the Christian code in Christian belief were sapped, it was unlikely that the superstructure of morals which was raised upon them would indefinitely survive. Nor has it done so. It would, I think, be generally agreed that in this country, at least, the moral level of behaviour has further declined since the outbreak of the second world war. This decline has occurred not merely in the sphere of

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

sexual morals; it is also to be observed in the practice of the specifically Christian virtues, in charity, mercy, pity, honesty and unselfishness. The decline had already begun before 1914 and each of the two wars has accelerated the process.

Thirdly, in the sphere of art, a lack of standards is said to be a noticeable characteristic of the movements which have made their appearance during the last three decades. Expressionism, Surrealism and Existentialism are, perhaps, the most distinctive of these movements. Of them it may be said that they have sought less to imitate or represent the external world than to express the moods of the artists and writers. Novelists wove atmospheres instead of constructing plots, while poets used verse as a vehicle for the outpourings of agitated emotions and the intricacies of tortured thought. There have never been so many novelists, there have not often been so many poets; yet, judged by Victorian standards, there have been few great novels and fewer great poems.

Fourthly, in the sphere of taste—and this is a charge made more particularly by the old against the young—the age has lost the sense of quality.

I shall develop these points in later chapters.<sup>1</sup> My present purpose is to emphasize the lack of standards which these tendencies illustrate.

*Illustration from Art.* The point is not so much that contemporary art is bad, as that there is no agreement as to the standards by which it might be pronounced to be good. In the classical ages there were certain agreed criteria of literary and artistic excellence. A good work possessed certain virtues, for example, lucidity, poise, balance, elegance, measure and harmony. One knew what the artist who produced it was 'after'. In the romantic ages there were still standards of value, though the criteria were vaguer; but today everybody judges for himself and holds himself to be as good a judge as his neighbour. That this should be so follows inevitably from the subjectivist position according to which beauty is not in the work of art but in 'the eye of the beholder'. Hence, if the beholder's eye sees something to be beautiful, there is no appeal against his judgement. It follows further that *that* will be the most beautiful, which seems to be so in

<sup>1</sup> See chapters xi and xii.

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

the eyes of most people, with the corollary that the way to establish aesthetic merit is to count heads. Thus, Alexander Woolcott,<sup>1</sup> a once celebrated American critic, reported of George Gershwin that he was a genius. He did not tell us in what direction Gershwin's genius lies,<sup>2</sup> and we were left to infer on *a priori* grounds that it is in music. Woolcott, it seems, really believed that in the *Rhapsody in Blue* he had detected the hand of genius. We live, after all, in a democracy and in a democracy every man's opinion is as good, is it not, as his neighbour's? Once again, our age would seem to have been specially designed to illustrate Plato's account of the tendencies of democracy quoted on a previous page, by exhibiting in its characteristic beliefs and habits the distinguishing marks of the democratic man.<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, too, it calls to mind Plato's account of the man who in the sphere of art thinks that 'there is no real beauty and no Form of real beauty eternally invariable, but recognizes many beautifuls'.

Granted the correctness of the foregoing account of objective and subjective judgements, granted, too, the widespread contemporary acceptance of the subjectivist analysis of aesthetic and moral judgements, we are, I think, entitled to conclude that many of the phenomena at which I have glanced in this chapter do follow naturally and logically from it. It is to be noted that all involve in different ways what I have called 'the dropping of the object'.

### *Some Consequences of the 'Dropping of the Object'*

Having constructed a provisional framework, I propose to pass in preliminary review some contemporary forms and fashions of thought, morals and art, with a view to seeing how far they can be fitted into its slots.

(i) In aesthetics, one man's opinion is as good as another's. This follows because if there is no recognition of an 'object', then there are no pictures which are intrinsically beautiful, no music which is intrinsically great, no literature which is intrinsically valuable to serve as a standard whereby one man's taste may be measured against another's and judged to be better or worse

<sup>1</sup> In *Long, Long Ago*, published in the summer of 1945.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 103.

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

than that other's, or even judged to be good or bad. Indeed, in the absence of such an objective standard, the use of the words 'good' and 'bad' in this connection seems to be meaningless. If, for comparison's sake, we take a judgement from an age in which standards were recognized, the age of the eighteenth century, we shall at once see how little endorsement it would receive from our own. Here, then, is Sir Joshua Reynolds, telling us that 'taste does not come by chance or nature; it is a long and laborious business to acquire it. It is the lowest style only of the arts, whether of painting, poetry or music that may be said in the vulgar sense to be naturally pleasing'. The customary effect of a passage such as this upon those to whom it is quoted is to provoke against Sir Joshua the charge of aesthetic snobbery. Plato would say that the view from which this charge springs is peculiarly appropriate to dwellers in a democracy, for democracy in this connection meant, for Plato, a society in which all works are held in honour, particularly such as appeal to the taste of the masses, a society, too, in which any attempt to erect standards of taste by which *this* can be commended as finer, or subtler, or profounder than *that*, is dismissed as 'high-browism', gross intellectualism or aesthetic snobbery. One man's opinion being as good as another's, that opinion which most share comes to be regarded as the best.

(ii) Similarly in regard to morals, one man's judgement about right or wrong is taken to be as good as another's, precisely because no 'object' is postulated in the shape of a moral order which, existing independently of ourselves and rooted in the nature of things, can serve as a standard by reference to which one mode of behaviour can be judged morally superior to another, one code of morals more nearly to represent what is right or what ought to be done. There is, in fact, no such thing as right and wrong; there is only what most people think to be right and wrong, with the corollary that in so far as the word 'right' has any meaning at all, what at any given moment most people *think* to be right has the best claim to the title of right. As Thucydides says, in a memorable passage describing the growing intensity and savagery of the class struggle in Corcyra during the Peloponnesian War:

'The meaning of words had no longer the same relation to things, but was changed by them as they thought proper. Reckless

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

daring was held to be loyal courage; prudent delay was the excuse of a coward; moderation was the disguise of unmanly weakness; to know everything was to do nothing; frantic energy was the true quality of a man. A conspirator who wanted to be safe was a recreant in disguise; the lover of violence was always trusted and his opponent suspected.'

Meanwhile, lacking any external good to serve as an end in the interests of which we should be justified in disciplining ourselves to the acceptance of an obligation or to the following of a difficult line of conduct, we tend to accept personal pleasure as the only standard of value. For, as I have already noted, the pleasurable-ness of a state of mind can, unlike its rightness, be assessed without reference to any external standard, since pleasure carries its own hallmark of approval. If I am pleased, I *am* pleased and nobody is in a position to deny that I am.

(iii) *Agnosticism in regard to Metaphysics*. In thought, 'the dropping of the object' leads by a fairly obvious route to agnosticism. First, as regards metaphysics; if you think that judgements to the effect that reality is one, or is a unity, or is many, or is good at bottom, or is dual, being both good and bad, or is mind, or is thought, or is matter, or is this, that or the other, are not judgements about an 'object' but are, in fact, subjective, in the sense that they only give information about the attitude to reality of the person judging, then, it is clear, they do not and cannot give information about reality. They are not philosophy since they do not tell us anything about the nature of the universe; they are psychology since they do tell us something about the nature of the judger. On this view, the correct translation of these judgements runs somewhat as follows: I (supposing that in the case in question *I* am the judger) am the sort of person—so a psychoanalyst might tell me—who would naturally tend to take this particular view of the nature of things. I am, for example, tough-minded or, alternatively, tender-minded<sup>1</sup> or—as Jung might tell me—am extraverted or introverted, or am an ectomorph or an endomorph or a mesomorph—as Mr. Sheldon might say—or feel a need for a father figure or a nostalgia for the womb or a

<sup>1</sup>I am thinking here of William James's famous distinction between 'tough-minded' and 'tender-minded' persons.

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

desire for death—as the Freudian might suggest, and so I represent reality not as alien and remote but as friendly and akin to myself in nature and responsive to my wishes. The representation having been effected by my temperament or my unconscious, I set my reason to work to invent arguments for thinking that the kind of reality which I wish to inhabit does, in fact, exist. If, as F. H. Bradley puts it, metaphysics is a finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, to find these reasons is no less an instinct. If this *is* the way the mind works and if we believe that it is—and the disposition so to interpret its workings is today very strong—it follows that we do not and cannot obtain any knowledge of reality as reality is in itself. Thought can only throw light on the cosmic longings of the self. Indeed, we cannot know that there *is* a reality other than the world of spatio-temporal events in which our bodies move; therefore, metaphysics goes by the board.

(iv) *Scepticism in regard to Ideals and to Progress.* Similarly with Idealism, if by Idealism is meant the conceiving of morally desirable ends, coupled with the conviction that these should be striven for and can be realized by our striving; examples are the belief in the perfectability of man and faith in the ultimate establishment of the millennium. Idealism presupposes that there is something which is good and valuable, that this something ought to exist and that by our efforts we can help to bring it about and should strive to do so. The ‘something’ may be realized in society upon earth, in which case the Idealism is utopian, or it may be realized in the individual’s own nature, in the sense in which it was believed, for example by many Victorians, that human nature is ultimately perfectible, in which case we should strive to strengthen our characters, to become better persons and to live better lives. Idealism, in maintaining that such an improved state whether of society or of persons is possible is making an objective judgement. It is, first, postulating something as objectively desirable; it is saying, secondly, that this desirable ‘something’ has a definite meaning for the person judging; it is saying, thirdly, that this something can be brought about or can at least be brought nearer, and it is saying, fourthly, that men’s efforts can assist to bring it nearer and that we ought, therefore, to make these efforts. Now,

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

if such judgements as 'we ought to strive for an increase of good' are *merely* subjective, in the sense that they do not say anything about duty or about good, but merely about our personal opinions or feelings in regard to duty or good, or about those of society, then Idealism, in the sense in which I have described it, is no more than a projection of our hopes and wishes upon the canvas of the future. Similarly with the belief in progress, for progress implies not only movement but movement in a certain direction and the notion of direction entails that of goal.<sup>1</sup> Now from the nature of the case, the goal to which the movement which 'progresses' endeavours to advance, and by the degree of its approximation to which the extent of its 'progress' is measured, cannot itself be internal to or part of the movement which seeks to realize it. (The winning post in a race cannot be carried by the runner.) It must be external to and independent of the 'progressing' movement. To judge, then, that the human mind and spirit progress, entails a judgement to the effect that there is something other than the human mind and spirit; entails, in fact, that there is a goal which exists and which is independent of us, so that, however much we may differ as to what it is and how near to it we may be, it can in theory act as a measuring rod or scale for the assessing and grading of the comparative positions of different persons and societies on the scale. But if judgements are not objective, we cannot meaningfully assert that there is such a goal; we can assert only that we are so constituted as to think that there is a goal, or that we long for a goal, or that we behave *as if* there were a goal. Hence, the subjectivist analysis of moral and social judgements leads to scepticism in regard not only to the fact but also to the meaning of progress.

(v) *Scepticism in regard to Religion.* That scepticism is entailed, finally, in regard to theology is, I think, obvious, the case of theology being, from this point of view, a special case of metaphysics. If we cannot judge objectively that there is a reality which is thus and thus, we cannot judge objectively that there is a reality which is a personal creative being. Hence, confronted by the phenomenon of religion, we shall have to give an explanation of it more or less on the following lines.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter x, p. 230, for a development of this.

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

For our explanation of the *origin* of the religious consciousness we shall have recourse to the anthropologist. He will present us with a picture of primitive man alone and helpless in a threatening and incomprehensible universe; his welfare at the mercy of forces that he can neither understand nor control, forces of fire and flood, of earthquake and drought, which decimate his communities and his cattle and blight his crops. Uncomfortably near are other communities whose attitude is often uncertain and hostile. The loneliness and menace of this situation are intolerable and so primitive man invents a number of semi-human creatures, gods and goddesses and spirits of good and evil, whom he endows with control over the alien, impersonal forces of nature. The advantage of the gods and goddesses lies in the fact that being semi-human they are amenable to human influence; their goodwill can be secured by bribes, their ill-will averted by sacrifices and prayer. A scale of sacrifices is prescribed, graduated in importance according to the magnitude of the benefits desired. By their aid rain can be brought down from heaven, floods averted, the machinations of enemy tribes frustrated. . . .

The anthropologist will also tell us of a complicated system of taboos relating, for example, to marriage, of exogamy and endogamy and other practices which, designed originally for sound utilitarian reasons, designed, that is to say, in order to promote the welfare of the tribe, are invested with a mystical authority by the sanction of religion. The gods, it is intimated, will be angry if the young men of the tribe marry daughters of the tribe or, alternatively, the daughters of other tribes, and so on. . . . From these early beginnings, these purely utilitarian beginnings, religion took its rise. It is not the expression of man's consciousness of God's impact upon his world; it is a creation of his own consciousness, born of propitiation and bribery, a witness to the needs and purposes of the tribe.

The motives which have determined the development of religion are not fundamentally different from those which governed its origin. We have considered the position of primitive man; let us, still following the implications of subjectivist metaphysics, take a look at his present predicament. Modern science confronts man with a vast and alien universe in which no trace of the human or



## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

the friendly can be discerned. Amid the empty tracts of astronomical space and geological time man feels to the full his loneliness and insignificance. Finding the scientific picture emotionally intolerable, his emotions set his reason to work to insist that it cannot be the whole picture or the only picture. Underlying the world disclosed by science, there must, he maintains, be another. And so he comforts his loneliness and compounds for his insignificance by insisting that at the heart of things, and in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the universe is friendly and akin, is, in fact, a Being like himself. God, then, is a product of human desire, a shadow cast by man's need for comfort and assurance upon the blank canvas of a meaningless universe. On this view, to judge that there is a God and that He is of such and such a kind is merely to express our need for God, or our desire for God, or our feeling that there is God, whereby we are impelled to set our reasons to work to satisfy our need, to fulfil our desire and to justify our feeling.

Thus, all theological reasoning is exhibited as a form of rationalizing. Reason does not report without bias upon the nature of a universe that it disinterestedly surveys. The tool of instinct and the handmaid of desire, it works to ensure the comfort of its masters. We desire a meaningful and friendly world; reason assures us that the world has the qualities which we desire.

## 3. RETURN TO DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

The argument here returns to its starting point. The 'dropping of the object' entails that the worth or validity of experience cannot be assessed by reference to the 'objects' which evoke it. We cannot, for example, say that experience is holy *because it is* of God, or that it is evil *because it is* of Satan. We can only say that this experience is of such and such a kind and that that is of another kind. Experience, then, must be assessed, in so far as it can be assessed at all, by reference to its intrinsic qualities, since it cannot be assessed by reference to anything else.

Three results follow. First, experience must be for its own sake,

## PROPOSED DEFINITION OF DECADENCE

since it cannot be for the sake of anything else. Secondly, in so far as we attempt to estimate the worth of experience, we shall do so by reference to a single standard, the degree of its pleasurable-ness. Thirdly, valuing experience for its own sake, we shall tend to hold that the more intense and the more various the experience the better ; we shall, in short, reach Pater's position. Thus, it is no accident that the various attitudes I have enumerated, aesthetic, moral, and religious Subjectivism, Hedonism, Scepticism, and the valuing of experience for its own sake, tend to be found together. Their coincidence in the minds and attitudes of members of a society constitutes, I believe, part at least of what we call decadence.

The characteristics of a decadent society are fairly constant. According to Palinurus's *Unquiet Grave*<sup>1</sup> they are 'luxury, scepticism, weariness and superstition'. These, he says, being himself decadent and, therefore, sceptical, constitute 'the goal of all cultures', for 'the goal of all cultures is to decay through over-civilization'. I agree very largely with Palinurus's list of the stigmata of decadence ; I venture to add a preoccupation with the self and its experiences, promoted by and promoting the subjectivist analysis of moral, aesthetic, metaphysical and theological judgements. With these additions the list is, I think, tolerably complete. I do not, however, agree that these characteristics constitute the *necessary* goal of all cultures. I do not, that is to say, think that all civilizations are bound to decay. In the next chapter I shall venture upon certain criticisms both of what I have called the subjectivist analysis of judgement and of the attitudes to morals and art that derive from it. I shall criticize, in other words, the decadent way of life and the scale of values associated with it. I shall later enumerate certain characteristics of our own age and art and consider how far they conform to the definitions I have sought to establish.

<sup>1</sup> Published early in 1945.

## CHAPTER V

### Some Criticisms and Consequences of the 'Dropping of the Object'

I propose in this chapter to suggest certain criticisms of the view described in the last chapter and there provisionally identified, or at least associated, with decadence. If the criticisms of this view are valid, then the attitudes which are associated with it and the consequences which follow from it, are such as we ought to avoid. To say that what is decadent ought to be avoided is, I suppose, a truism. I justify this chapter of criticism on the ground that the view in question is widely held at the present time, the attitudes are fashionable and the consequences widespread, and that criticism, therefore, is not wholly academic but, in so far as it is successful, may serve a practical purpose by influencing in a sense hostile to decadence the reader with whom it succeeds.

#### 1. PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE 'DROPPING OF THE OBJECT'

I will begin by criticizing at the surface level the concept of decadence as defined. Is it true (*a*) that it is not the end or object of experience but experience itself that is valuable? Is it true (*b*) that all experience is of equal value or significance or that, even if it is not so in the raw, we should contrive to make it so, or treat it as if it were so?

##### *(a) The Fallacy that Experience has Value Independently of its 'Object'*

As regards the first point, I should say that it is the object or source of experience that confers value upon it. Thus, the

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

experience of eating a fresh or well cooked egg is different from and more valuable than that of eating a stale or incorrectly cooked egg precisely because the sources or objects of the two experiences, that is to say, the two eggs are different, because, in fact, one of them is fresh and the other is stale; and the two experiences are different for no other reason whatever. It is, no doubt, true that the experience of pursuing or enjoying valuable objects is itself valuable and it may well be the case that in retrospect it is the experience itself which is remembered as having value. But the experience as seen in retrospect has value precisely because not the experience but its object seemed to us to be valuable *at the time of its pursuit or enjoyment*. In other words, the perceived value of the object of the experience is logically and chronologically prior to what is later recognized to have been the value of the experience. What is more, if the object were not thought to be valuable and valuable in and for itself, the experience of pursuing or enjoying or knowing it would also seem in retrospect to have been without value.

Hegel is credited with the remark that 'the attainment of the Infinite End just consists in preserving the illusion that there is an End to be attained'. Possibly, possibly not; but if the Infinite End were known to be what, if Hegel is right, it is, namely, an illusion then no attempt to attain it would be made. A similar fallacy underlies the familiar *cliché* that it is 'better to travel hopefully than to arrive'. If men believed it, they would neither hopefully travel nor disappointedly arrive; in fact, they would not travel at all.

The widespread adoption of this fallacy by a community is, in my view, a sign of decadence. It leads to the neglect and in extreme cases to the elimination of ends and as a corollary to the acceptance of means as ends. Let me, first, give some examples of this fallacy at the surface level.

Speed is a means to an end. It is the means which enables us to travel rapidly to the place at which we desire to be. Many of us have, however, come to treat speed as an end in itself and take advantage of the power of speed to travel rapidly to places which give us no more satisfaction than those which we have left. 'Let's go places', the Americans say; but it is not the 'places' but the 'going' which is valued. Similarly 'saving time' is a means to

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

the fruitful use of the time that has been saved ; but people may be observed moving heaven and earth in order to save five minutes which they have not the faintest idea what to do with when they have saved them. Also no society has had so little time to spare as our own which is always saving it, from which it appears that it is not the use of the time saved but the actual process of saving it which is valued.

Efficiency is rightly valued, since the efficient doing of things that are necessary sets one free for the doing of things that are not necessary, but are deliberately chosen because they are seen to be worth while. Thus, the efficient performance of housework by devices such as refrigerators, Aga cookers and drying machines is rightly praised by housewives ; yet their chief effect is too often to rob the housewife's life of what little significance it once possessed in order that she may be set free for the movies and the matinées. In course of time efficiency comes to be valued as an end in itself and, provided that things are done efficiently, it no longer very much matters what the things are that are done, as the Army values button-polishing as an end irrespective of any end for the sake of which it is desired that buttons should be bright.

Money, again, is made for the sake of the things that money will buy, the purpose of acquiring money being to enable the holder to use the money to buy things that he desires ; money, then, is a means ; things are an end. But in our civilization capital is accumulated in order that it may be used for the purpose of accumulating capital. When it comes to realizing the ends to which the accumulated capital should be a means, comes, that is to say, to spending the capital which has been accumulated, our conceptions are too often limited to the multiplication of material objects and the rapid alteration of the position in space of pieces of matter, including our own bodies.

Similarly, power is originally desired in order that it may be used for purposes which rightly or wrongly seem to the power holder to be important as, for example, the institution of social services, the amelioration of the lives of citizens, the winning of victories in battle, the patronage of friends or the promotion of relations. Presently, however, it comes to be desired as an end in itself and men who first sought power for disinterested or semi-

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

interested motives are found to be clinging to it because of the pleasure of its exercise.

Tired town dwellers take country cottages in order, presumably, that they may use them at weekends and on holidays as a means to a different and more satisfying way of life. But being ignorant of the facts that new ways and habits of life cannot be easily or quickly acquired and that the habituation of the self to country pursuits and interests is a long and tedious process, all that they, in fact, succeed in achieving is a life lived at a rather lower level of efficiency and performance than the same kind of life as lived in the town. The bridge which is played is less skilled, the food eaten is not so well cooked and there is trouble over the plumbing arrangements or the electric light plant. Thus, the possession of a country cottage instead of being a means to an end becomes like the car an end in itself.

These are examples at the surface level of the confusion between means and ends, with the resultant acceptance of means for ends, which is characteristic of our civilization. This mistaken identification may be taken as one of the signs of decadence, but whether it is a cause as well as a sign must be left for later consideration. The examples constitute on the plane of practice illustrations of the attitude of mind which on the plane of theory I have called 'the dropping of the object', which in its turn is part cause, part result of the prevalence of the subjectivist analysis of judgement.

This analysis will be subjected to criticism in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup>

### *(b) The Fallacy that all Experiences are of Equal Significance*

As regards the second, it is obvious that at the surface level the statement that all experiences are of equal significance is untrue. It is also untrue that they can by an act of will be made to seem so.

It is nonsense, for example, to tell the rock climber that the moments of thrilling suspense that he experiences on the rock face are not more significant than the pipe he smokes after tea, or the yawn to which he gives vent as he makes his way upstairs to bed, or, more precisely, than the experiences of pipe smoking and yawning. Or, to take an example from the inner life of the spirit,

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vi., pp. 145-62.

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

it is nonsense to tell the mystic that the experience of self-transcendence in communion with God is not more significant than the experience of the dark night of the soul, when God withholds Himself and we seek Him in vain ; or the writer, that the experiences involved in a full and fruitful morning's work are not more significant than the sense of futility and frustration with which *accidie* afflicts those who seek to discipline their wills to the thankless task of grinding out words after a good lunch at three o'clock in the afternoon. It is, indeed, difficult to resist the temptation to conclude that it is only to those who have not at any time been privileged to feel themselves used to the last ounce of their energies and capacities in work which they believe to be supremely worth while that such a view could ever seem plausible. In other words, it is only in so far as our lives are *not* interesting and *not* significant, in so far, therefore, as we bring no zest to the living of them that we shall tend to think that all experiences are of equal significance ; or that, if they do not *seem* to be equally significant, we should try to make them so. Now men's lives tend to approximate to this condition in the absence of a strong faith, a firmly held conviction, absorption in an art or craft or the technique of a job, or of a dominating personal ambition. In the absence of a cause to engage a man's loyalties, a religion to demand his sacrifices and self-denials, an ambition to evoke his energies and to impose its disciplines, he will be apt to find life flat and tiring and experience insipid ; and, because it *is* insipid, he will seek to give it flavour by doctrines which insist upon its necessary and intrinsic significance. It is no accident, then, that the doctrine of the equal value of all experiences should be the peculiar emanation of so-called decadent ages, and that views maintained by the aesthetes of the 'nineties, should reappear in the works of the Existentialists of the 'forties.

## 2. SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THE 'DROPPING OF THE OBJECT'

So far we have remained at the surface level ; it is time to look below it. Socrates said that all intentional activities were for the sake of good, by which he meant that nobody acts voluntarily

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

and with intention except in order to bring about a condition of affairs which he thinks will be better than that which now prevails. (He may, of course, and frequently does make mistakes as to what good is, identifying it, perhaps, with sensual pleasure, the accumulation of money or the sufferings of other people.) Thus, on Socrates' view, when we do wrong or pursue what is evil, we do so as the result of a misjudgement as to what is good.

All this is familiar enough to any student of philosophy. A conclusion not so frequently drawn is that when, owing to the 'dropping of the object', the concept of objective good, the notion, that is to say, that there are things which are desirable in themselves and are not rendered desirable merely by reason of the fact that we happen to desire them, is obscured or repudiated, we shall tend to identify good with our own states of mind and feeling. Instead of saying, 'I shall aim at this because it is good', our tendency will be to say, 'I shall hope to enjoy certain states of mind which I expect to attend the pursuit of "this" '. The production of certain states of mind will thus become the end to which our actions are directed. Now if our own states of mind become the ends of our actions, we shall naturally conclude that the more intense, the more highly coloured, the more varied they are, the better ; in fact, to return to the definition given in the last chapter, we shall hold that experience is the end and demand that experience should be as significant and as various as possible.

Let me restate this conclusion in a series of propositions. First, if we 'drop the object', we shall argue that there are no objective and independent goods, or that, if there are, we cannot know them ; secondly, we shall maintain that the only good that we can know is our own experience ; thirdly, we shall conclude that the more experiences we enjoy the better, which brings us again within sight of our definition of decadence.

### *The Fallacy that Self-Expression is always a Good*

Now one obvious method of enjoying what seems to be significant experience is by *expressing* the self. Hence arises the associated doctrine that self-expression is a good in itself. This ramifies through many phases of contemporary life: it colours men's views on the education of children and the relationship of



## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

marriage; it affects literature, drama and the ballet; it issues in nature worship and nudism. Of some of these manifestations I shall have more to say in Part II. Here I am concerned only with the formal doctrine that self-expression is a good in itself.

As to this, it should be a sufficient criticism to point out that nobody really believes it. What we do believe is that some forms of self-expression are good, others bad; that the expression of the self in sympathy is good; in jealousy, bad; in kindness, good; in cruelty, bad; in helpfulness and service, good; in malice and self-aggrandisement, bad.

Moreover—and this also we know—in so far as what is expressed is bad, the more expression of it there is, the worse. This is obviously true of the expression of traits of character. For example, if I am good-tempered and kindly when sober, but am a congenital dipsomaniac with a tendency to wife-beating when drunk, it is obvious that the more I express myself in terms of my sober traits of kindliness and good temper, the less I express myself in terms of my congenitally drunken traits of rage and violence, the better. This is also true of the expression of the personality as a whole. Thus if a man whose nature is partly or mainly sadistic is put in charge of a concentration camp, the more he expresses himself in the torture of prisoners, the better, perhaps, for him, but the worse for the prisoners. (I doubt if even Walter Pater would maintain that the experiences enjoyed by the torturing camp commandant, even if they would require, on his premises, to be regarded as 'significant' from the point of view of the commandant, as they are certainly highly expressive of his personality, were, therefore, objectively valuable or such as ought to be promoted.)

It is to be regretted that it should be necessary to make such obvious points. In the light of the prevalent cult of self-expression I make no apology for doing so.

*Comment that the Enjoyment of any form of Valuable Experience Entails some degree of Discipline and Boredom*

What is, perhaps, not so obvious is that if a man believes in the value of *all* forms of self-expression and *all* the resultant

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

experiences and if, in pursuance of his belief, he seeks to enjoy all, then he will tend to miss those which are valuable; for, generally speaking, the most valuable experiences come only to those who have been willing to undergo the ordeal of a certain period of boredom and to subject themselves to a certain degree of restraint. It may even be the case that the most valuable of all come only through prayer and fasting—such, indeed, is the tradition of the great Christian teachers.

Hence, if you believe, as our age tends to do, in experience for its own sake you will lack, (*a*) the time to essay, (*b*) the self-control and discipline to endure, (*c*) the faith to go through with the preparatory periods of boredom and to put up with the preparatory restraints, not to speak of the prayer and the fasting; for the habit of seeking to make all your experiences pleasurable significant will have frittered away your time, weakened your self-discipline, sapped your control and blunted and dulled the finer faculties of your being.

### *Illustration from the Case of Music*

Take, for example, the case of great music, which is also difficult music, for instance, Bach's Art of Fugue or Beethoven's posthumous Quartets. It is not the case that these can be either quickly or easily appreciated. For most of us the way to appreciation lies through tracts of boredom and periods of discouragement. In our pilgrimage in search of the greatest that music has to offer, most of us must experience from time to time the dark night of the musical soul which unless we endure with patience and humility, we must fall by the wayside. Unless we are prepared to have faith and to be patient and humble, saying to ourselves since 'more perceptive men, more musically experienced men than I have penetrated into the glorious heart of this music and reported it to be, indeed, glorious, I, too, if I try hard enough, may come to share something of their experience', the task will never be accomplished, the necessary height of musical appreciations never scaled.

What impedes its accomplishment? Lack of time, of leisure and of quiet; lack of concerts, lack of a radio, lack of a gramophone,

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

lack of a cultivated environment where the hearing of great music is taken for granted as an integral part of the good life. All these are clear and obvious impediments. But there is also the habit of accepting as of equal value music whose enjoyment comes easily and quickly, which can even be enjoyed at the first hearing; for example, the earlier work of Beethoven, or the Waldstein and Appassionata Sonatas of the middle period which intoxicated us in our youth, or the music of second-class composers, Tchaikowsky or Chopin or Dvorak, or sounds which do not strictly belong to the class of music at all, such as jazz and swing.<sup>1</sup>

For with these we may all too easily live and, if we live long enough, they will ultimately eat away our capacity to enjoy what is better. Presently, they will generate in us an attitude of mind which denies the better things or denies that they are better. It will insist that there is only one factor to be taken into account in judging music, namely, the expression of the composer's personality in the music and the expression of our own in the liking and disliking of it; now one man's likes, it will add, are as good as another's.

### *And of Mountains*

This I believe to be profoundly untrue.

The view which you see from the top of a mountain which you have ascended by a mountain railway is literally different from that which you see if you climb the same mountain in the sweat of your brow; or if it be maintained, as I suppose it might, that the view is the same, then I insist that the experience of seeing it is different, different and in the second case, richer and better.

It is not merely the contrast of present ease with the ardours and endurances of the climb; nor even that the spirit washed clean by the solitude and, perhaps, the perils of the ascent, is more receptive. More even than these things is the fact that you have mixed your spirit with that of the mountain, as the labourer mixes his with the earth he tills, so that it yields more to you as the girl to her lover, than it does to the man who rapes its beauties by assault in train, or car, or plane. Now, if you continually

<sup>1</sup> See for a development of this theme chapter xi, pp. 273-5.

## SOME CRITICISMS AND CONSEQUENCES

assault mountains by means of mountain railways and never on foot, you will not only not know these greater joys and deeper experiences; you will not even know that they exist and will be disposed in your ignorance to dismiss as hypocrisy and pose the literature and traditions of the lovers of mountains, so that in the end the deeper channels of the spirit will become altogether closed to you.

Thus, the belief that all experiences are valuable or are of equal value militates against the enjoyment of those that are, in fact, more valuable. I conclude that we all ought to aim at the sort of experiences which are enjoyed by the lover of late Beethoven quartets and the climber of mountains on foot and ration ourselves in respect of experiences whose persistent enjoyment interferes with those that are higher but less accessible.

### *Intrusion of Ethical Concepts*

But here, I see, I have been inadvertently betrayed into using the words 'better' and 'ought' and 'higher'; I had meant to postpone their use with all that it implies until the next section. But I cannot, I find, keep them out of the argument any longer, so I had better say at once what I take their implications to be.

If you say that something is 'good', you mean that it 'ought' to be pursued, irrespective of whether it is, in fact, pursued or not. When you use the word 'ought', you imply that there is some sanction which justifies its use. Thus, when you say that the criminal 'ought' to be punished, you mean 'ought' by reference to the standard of well-being of society as a whole, or 'ought' by reference to the moral law which the criminal had outraged. When you say that one experience is 'higher' or more 'valuable' than another, if you do not merely mean more pleasant—and I do not mean that—you are implicitly invoking some standard by reference to which the height and value can be measured, as when I say 'this weighs more than that', I am invoking a standard of weights and measures other than the 'this' and 'that' which are measured by them. I must, then, at this point say something of these ethical values, sanctions and standards which I am indicating by the words 'better', 'ought' and 'higher'.

## CHAPTER VI

### Analysis of the Activity of Knowing

**H**ere for the first time I enter the realm of philosophy proper. Let me begin by indicating the position I am proposing to maintain and its relevance to the immediately foregoing argument.

There is, I suggest, no way of escape from the view of experience, which I have called decadent, no answer, then, to the philosophy which maintains that life is just 'one damned thing after another' until we come to the last 'damned thing' which is death, after which there is nothing at all, unless we concede the existence of some factor in the universe other than and external to ourselves, a factor which appearing sometimes as goal, sometimes as 'value', sometimes as sanction, sometimes as standard, can fulfil the office of an end which we *ought* to desire because it is good, of an ideal which we *ought* to pursue because it is desirable, and of a standard or scale of measurement by reference to which we can assess and grade our experiences, so that, when we judge some experiences to be more important or more valuable than others, we are not simply confessing our own prejudices and preferences but are acknowledging the existence of the standard to which we are referring them. This 'something other' I have called 'the object'. The purport of the foregoing discussion is, then, to confront us with the need for the recognition of 'the object'.

#### *Theory of Judgement*

But a need to recognize does not in itself constitute a sufficient ground for recognition. What reasons, then, are there for the view I have expressed that a satisfactory theory of judgement must make provision for a reference to 'the object'?

In order to answer this question I must permit myself a brief incursion into matters of philosophical controversy. Those who

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

have no taste for such discussions are recommended to omit the following pages and to proceed at once to chapter viii.

There are two matters about which something must briefly be said; first, the nature of the cognitive relation and, secondly, the subjectivist analysis of judgement. The latter demands a separate chapter.

### *Nature of the Cognitive Relation*

By the cognitive relation I mean the relation into which the mind enters with what it knows, whenever it knows anything. The nature of this relation is one of the most controversial topics of philosophy and occupies a larger place in the history of the subject than, perhaps, any other. I cannot discuss it at any length here; I can only state dogmatically certain conclusions, the reasons for which I have set forth elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Most philosophers have held that the mind contributes something to the objects which it knows, imposing upon them certain characteristics which, unknown, they would not possess. If this is true, the object *as known* is in some sense dependent upon the mind of the knower for being what it is. Others have gone further and maintained that, since we cannot know what characteristics an object possesses when it is not known, or whether, indeed, it possesses any characteristics at all, the object as known may, for all we can tell to the contrary, be wholly dependent in respect of its characteristics on either the mind of the knower or upon mind in general. Others have asserted that what is known is literally a *part* of the mind that knows it, being, in fact, an experience of, or as it is sometimes put, an idea or an event in that mind. All these doctrines are variants of Idealism. I was brought up in the philosophical sense as a follower of the realist movement which maintained, as against Idealism, that what is known is always other than the activity of knowing it. Knowing, we held—it was for us a fundamental axiom—is an activity in and through which the mind is brought into contact with something other than its own activity of knowing. So stated, this sounds like a

<sup>1</sup>In *Matter, Life and Value*, Oxford University Press, and *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*, Allen & Unwin.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

truism and few would demur. But it leaves open the question whether what is known, though it may be other than the activity of knowing it, may not, nevertheless, be a part of or an event in the knower's mind as it is, for example, in self-consciousness. Thus, when I am conscious of being moody or of a pain in my foot, it might be maintained that the moodiness and the pain, though clearly other than the acts of being consciously aware of them, are, nevertheless, events in or states of the mind which is conscious. However this may be—and I do not propose here to enter into the intricacies which lie in front of those who would explore this difficult territory further—I did, in fact, come to believe that the object of knowledge, so far from being always and necessarily a part of the mind that knew it, could be and usually was other than the knowing mind. Almost I would go to the length of maintaining that we *never* know our own ideas.

### *Knowledge as Awareness of what is Other than the Knowing Self*

It is not my intention here to pursue at any length these technical matters; it is sufficient for my purpose to indicate the kind of view which after many years reading and teaching philosophy I have come to hold in regard to them. Briefly, I think of knowledge as the activity of a mind whereby the mind is made aware of something other than itself. As with knowledge, so with experience; I have come to think of experience in general and of the experience of knowing in particular after the model of a transparent pane of glass which lets the experiencing mind through into a world which is other than and outside itself. In so far as the pane is clear, is, therefore, *really* transparent, it escapes the notice of the mind that looks through it, since it interposes nothing between the mind and 'the object'. We are all familiar with the view which represents a living body or a community as happy in the degree to which it is not concerned with itself. A body, we say, is healthy if it is unaware of itself; a people, in so far as it is happy, has no history. In my view, what is true of a body and of a people is *mutatis mutandis* true of a mind and of its experience. It is only when the pane is flecked and cracked or is clouded and darkened that, instead of

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

getting a clear view of what lies without, the mind finds its vision deflected by the cracks in its own structure or clouded by the deposit laid down by its own workings, deflected and clouded, in effect, by itself. It then becomes interested in and may even become preoccupied by the self and the experiences of the self. Now preoccupation with the self and its experiences is undesirable precisely because it cuts off the person so preoccupied from the world.

To return to the theory of knowledge, the view that what is known is something other than and unaffected by the knowing of it is commonly accepted by common sense in its application to sense perception. If I say 'This table is hard', or 'square', or 'black', it would not normally be maintained that I am making a statement about my own mind and its experiences. So far, then, as the knowledge of the physical world which is present to us in space and time is concerned, most people would agree that it is about precisely this world and not about our own mental states that the experience which we gain through the medium of the senses gives us information, revealing to us its features and reporting its physical characteristics.

They would probably agree that this is also the case in regard to its mathematical, spatial characteristics. Thus, if I say X that is twice as tall as y, or that b is to the left of c, they would agree that I am making statements about spatial relationships which are independent of my awareness of them; they would not wish to maintain that I was merely talking about ideas or experiences or opinions of my own.

### *Extension of the Arguments to Cover Characteristics which are Spatially and Temporally Absent*

Many would, I think, go further and make a similar concession in regard to pure mathematics. That  $3 + 2 = 5$ , that  $7 \times 7 = 49$ , that  $a^2 - b^2 = (a + b)(a - b)$  are, they would say, truths about the nature of things; more particularly about those 'things' which are mathematical quantities, however these may be defined, and not merely truths about the way in which our minds happen to work. Thus  $a^2 - b^2$  would, they might agree, continue to equal



## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

( $a + b$ ) ( $a - b$ ) even if nobody knew that it did, while the school-boy who having maintained that it equalled ( $a - b$ ) ( $a - b$ ) pleaded in self-defence that mathematical statements only describe the workings of minds and that this particular statement did, indeed, describe the workings of *his* mind, that the deliverance of his mind on the point was admittedly a minority deliverance, but that this fact did not necessarily prove him to be wrong—assuming that the word ‘wrong’ when used in this connection had any meaning at all, which except on the vulgar assumption that the majority is always right, on *this* view, of the nature of mathematical statements, it would not have—would find his plea receiving scant respect from an outraged schoolmaster.

If the spatial relations of visibly present objects can be known, as when I say ‘this’ is twice as high as ‘that’, and if abstract mathematical relations can be known, as when I saw that  $3 + 2 = 5$ , then it would seem unreasonable to maintain that the mathematical spatial relations of objects not present to us in space cannot also be known. Most people would agree that they could. Thus, if I know that *a* is twice as far from *b* as *c* is, where neither *a* nor *b* nor *c* is spatially present to me, most people would agree that I am knowing a spatial relation which is a fact and which is, moreover, independent of myself, although I am not at the moment perceiving with my senses either the relation or either of the things related. Similarly, with temporal relations: if I know that the train which reached King’s Cross from Edinburgh yesterday was half an hour late, or that it took me twice as long yesterday to walk from *x* to *y* as it took my friend, few would wish to maintain that I am talking about my own ideas or experiences and *not* about temporal facts which exist as facts independently of my knowledge of them, merely because the temporal facts happen to belong to the past. Thus, the realist theory of knowledge could be and was extended to embrace in the category of ‘objects’ which are known but which are independent of the acts of knowing them, and, what is more, of the minds that know them, spatial and temporal facts which are not spatially present to the senses of the knower or present with him at the same point in time.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

### *Extension of the Argument to Historical Facts, to Purposes and to Ideals*

Here we pass from perception to conception, that is to say, from the class of case in which the mind is confronted with objects of which it becomes aware through the stimulation of the sense organs by physical things or events belonging to the external world, to the class of case in which we obtain information about physical facts which the mind knows without the intermediation of the senses as, for example, in recollecting, in intuiting, or in foreseeing. The capacity for being directly aware of spatial and temporal facts which are not immediately contiguous to us, is normally held to be distinctive of man. The higher animals possess rudimentary memory, but it would seem to require a reminding physical object to call it forth. Thus, the dog shrinks from the whip because he remembers that it hurt him yesterday, whereas I can and do now call to mind historical events of which no actual reminder is present to my senses. Few would wish to maintain that when I know that the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815 what I am really knowing is a present fact about my own mind and not a fact which occurred in the past and is independent of my mind.

Let us extend this notion to embrace the future. I am maintaining that the mind of man can know and be influenced by 'objects' which are not present to his senses. I am maintaining, further, that this power of transcending the limitations of the immediate spatio-temporal environment is peculiar to man. As Professor Wilson, in a fascinating and insufficiently-known book with a misleading title, *The Miraculous Birth of Language*,<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, man, instead of being wholly dominated by space and time, can dominate them by memory and expectation and in thought can pass beyond the limitations of what is immediately present to his senses. Now if we can in thought pass beyond the limiting bounds of what is spatially and temporally present to us—and the process

<sup>1</sup>Prof. Wilson, it must be admitted, adduces this consideration as an argument for a Kantian treatment of space and time. In this I cannot follow him. If the animals are, as he suggests, really bound by space and time, then space and time cannot be merely the forms of our perception, as Kant says they are.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

of conceptual thinking certainly seems to suggest that we can—we can do so in both temporal directions. Hence, we can cherish purposes and conceive ideals as well as remember events, the essence of a purpose or an ideal being that it is thought of as something existing in the future. Though the aspirations we entertain and the efforts that we make to realize purposes and further ideals are in the present, purposes and ideals are not in the present but in the future. The existence of purposive activity in man thus suggests that there are present to his mind objects which lie in the future, although the experience of conceiving of and desiring them is an experience which takes place in the present.

Again, it would seem that this capacity is peculiar to man. A dog, no doubt, shows evidence of purposive action when rounding up sheep; even perhaps of enduring purpose in loyalty and devotion to a master. But it may be doubted whether these purposes are present to the dog when the physical object which calls them into consciousness, the sheep or the master, is not visibly present to it, or whether the purpose has any existence beyond the activity which the 'purpose' inspires. For my part, I suspect that the Behaviourist account of purpose, grossly inadequate in its application to man, affords a plausible description of purpose in dogs.

### *Extension of the Argument to the Apprehension of Timeless Facts*

As with historical facts, as with purposes and ideals, so also with principles and laws. Whereas the first are 'objects' in the past, the second 'objects' in the future, the third belongs to a class of 'object' which, I suggest, is not in time at all. This is clearly the case in regard to mathematical truths. That these are timeless in the sense that the fact that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is independent of the time process in which our knowledge of the fact occurs and in which particular couples of a kind can be added and perceived to make four of the same kind, would be generally agreed. The same concession would, I think, usually be made in regard to moral law. If we are prepared to grant that moral judgements do, in fact, refer to and give information about an 'object' other than

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

the judger, in so far, that is to say, as the subjectivist analysis of moral judgement is rejected—and reasons for its rejection will be given in the next chapter—we should, I think, also concede that the ‘object’ of the judgement is in some sense timeless and absolute. One’s duty, it is generally agreed, *should* be done, though the heavens fall, even though it may be hard to know what one’s duty is. Similarly, if an act is bad, the quality of badness which belongs to it has a character of timelessness which no event subsequently occurring can modify. For example, if this murder is wrong now then it is and will be wrong to the end of time. I am not raising the point whether murder may not in certain circumstances be justified; I am pointing out merely that, *if there are circumstances* in which it is wrong, then it always will be wrong if done in similar circumstances, whatever people think about it now, or may come to think about it in the future. I am suggesting, in other words, that Kant was right in holding that the moral imperative was absolute; right to imply that the moral law was part of the order of the cosmos.

I am not asking the reader at this stage to agree that there is a moral law or a moral order; merely to concede that, *if* there is, then it will have the character of timelessness which Kant claimed for it.

### *Beauty as a Timeless Fact*

Similarly in regard to beauty. There is a sense difficult to define, though writers on aesthetics frequently accept and refer to it, in which all great works of art are timeless. I do not mean by this merely that they appeal to every age; many do not. What I do mean is that each engenders its own atmosphere of stillness about it. To the extent to which we imbibe this atmosphere, we raise ourselves above the time process, so that although the time actually taken in listening to a Bach prelude may be five minutes as measured by the clock, the experience which we have enjoyed cannot accurately be described as either long or short. If we were asked to put our feeling about this experience into words, we should say that it is not measurable by time at all; or, rather, that only the unessential part of the experience was measurable.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

Similarly in listening to Beethoven's posthumous Quartets, one has a sense of breaking through into a new and different order of reality which lies beyond time. It was, I imagine, with this thought in mind that Browning described the moment of concentration in which, having gathered up all the energies of our being to one focal point, we realize and enjoy a picture as a whole, as 'a moment eternal'. Examples could be multiplied—the conclusion of the Andante of the Archduke Trio, Opus 97, when, the variations finished, the theme is lost in a sea of sound, is an outstanding one—but as I am not here trying so much to establish as to illustrate a point, I shall leave the reader to supply relevant instances from his own experience. All these cases, in so far as they are accepted as genuine cases, point to the same conclusion, that there is in a work of art a timeless element which, though it may clothe or manifest itself in what is temporal, is in some sense already in existence before the work was conceived. What the artist does is to catch this already existing element, trap it and make it actual in his work; but he does not himself create it.<sup>1</sup> A work of art is thus, to use a chemical metaphor, a catalyst for precipitating beauty. It is, perhaps, for this reason that a beautiful thing is often referred to as a *κτῆμα εἰς αἰὶν*.

### *God as an 'object'*

There is a further 'object', the admission of whose objectivity and timelessness is a natural extension of this line of thought, and that is Deity. I do not here wish to assert that God exists; it is sufficient for my purpose to point out that, *if* His existence be admitted, then it would also be admitted by almost all those who have meditated upon, believed in, or entered into communion with God that He is eternal, not in the sense of existing for a very long time or until the end of all time, whatever this expression may mean, but of being outside time altogether. For God, they have said, the whole time process rolls forward as a play develops before the audience. He observes it from outside as a spectator, but does not Himself take part in it as an actor. Thus, for Him, there is no distinction between present, past and future, a

<sup>1</sup> This idea is developed in a later chapter. (See chapter viii, pp. 167–83.)

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

consideration which may help to resolve the familiar objection to free will which takes the form of pointing out that since God, being omniscient, knows the future and since He cannot be mistaken, therefore the future is already determined by God's foreknowledge of it. On the view that I am here developing, it is true that God knows the future, but He does not know it, as we do, *as future*. He knows it in precisely the same way as He knows the past and present. If, then, there is ground for thinking that we have free will in respect of the process by which our actions bring the present to birth out of the past, the *particular* argument against free will, which is based on God's foreknowledge of the future, has no special force in its bearing upon the process by which the future is brought to birth out of the present. For the bearing of God's knowledge on the one situation is not different from its bearing upon the other.

I cannot here enter into the difficulties occasioned by the considerations, (*a*) that God, who is outside time, presumably created the world which is in time and, therefore, had a beginning at a moment of time; (*b*) that He presumably created time together with the world which is in time at a moment of time; (*c*) that He sent His Son into the world at a moment of time and has since intervened in the time process at various points with a succession of mighty acts. Faced with these difficulties, I must take refuge in the theological conception which affirms that, though God transcends the time process, He is also immanent in it, while emphasizing the point that nearly all theologians, however they may differ on other matters, agree that God is indeed transcendent. If this is the case, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of facts about Him constitute further examples of knowledge by the human mind of 'objects' which are eternal in the sense of being timeless. Just as in sense perception the mind is confronted with and obtains knowledge of an order of being possessing spatial qualities which the mind itself lacks, knowing objects as square or high or small, so in conceptual thinking it is confronted with and obtains knowledge in regard to an order of being which lacks the temporal qualities that it possesses. In sense perception mind which is not in space knows the spatial; in conceptual thinking mind which is in time knows the non-temporal.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

### *Summary of the Foregoing Argument*

The foregoing argument has covered considerable ground and I will try to bring it to a point. I have sought to maintain : (1) That all knowledge of any kind implies the existence of an 'object' to be known. (2) That in sense perception it is commonly agreed—except by some idealist philosophers—that the 'object' is independent of and other than the mind which knows it. (3) That the relation of the mind to the 'objects' which it knows in sense experience is not different from the relation which it bears to the 'objects' which it knows, when it remembers past 'objects', foresees future ones or calculates the spatial relations of 'objects' not immediately present to the sense organs of the body which it animates. Thus memory, expectation and calculation are all instances of knowledge by the mind of 'objects' which are both independent of and other than the mind which is aware of them. (4) That because the object known happens in these cases to occupy a different position in time from the mind that knows it, or in space from the body which is animated by that mind, we are not, therefore, justified in concluding that it is created by or is dependent upon the knowing mind for its characteristics in some sense in which 'objects' perceptibly present to the senses are *not* created and *not* dependent. (5) That if this is true of 'objects' occupying different positions in time and different areas of space, it is also true of 'objects' which are outside time and space altogether, for example mathematical objects, physical and moral laws, beauty, regarded as a universal principle, and God.

It follows that there is no ground in logic or theory of knowledge for supposing that in recognizing ideals, pursuing goals, fulfilling purposes, acknowledging the dictates of moral obligation, appreciating beauty in paint and sound and stone, or in knowing and loving God, we are only making acquaintance with the creatures of our own creation, introducing ourselves to the projections of our own minds, or permitting our wishes to prescribe its nature to the cosmos. There is no ground, in short, in logic or theory of knowledge for the 'dropping of the object', and no reason, therefore, to suppose that it is only our experiences and not the 'objects' of our experiences which are significant.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

### *The Marks of Humanity and of Civilized Humanity*

The truth would seem to be that one of the distinguishing marks of the human, as opposed to the animal, mind is precisely this ability to transcend the limitations of the temporally and spatially contiguous, and to be aware of and to respond to areas of the universe removed from us in space, to tracts of events which are distant from us in time and to orders of being which are not in space or in time.

Moreover, just as we recognize in this ability one of the chief marks of man's 'superiority' in the scale of evolution to the animals, so we believe those men and women who are most aware of and receptive to areas of reality which are not immediately contiguous to them in space and time to be 'superior' to those who are less aware. The civilized man, as compared with the savage, is one who indulges in fewer pursuits which have an immediate utilitarian significance, and who occasionally participates in activities which will not conduce to his advantage or to that of the group to which he belongs. Russell in his *A History of Western Philosophy* expresses the same point by defining a civilized man in terms of *forethought*. The civilized man as distinguished from the savage is, he says, 'willing to endure present pains for the sake of future pleasures even if the future pleasures are rather distant'. Russell connects this habit with the rise of agriculture which involves doing in the spring work which takes into account what will happen in the following winter. The definition provides an illustration of my general contention that the civilized man in pursuit of future interests takes account of objects which are not immediately present to him in space or time. But there is a further stage of development in which account is taken of objects which confer *no* personal advantage either present or future.

It is only in so far as man has emancipated himself from the imperatives of the biological struggle for existence that interests in the non-spatially and non-temporally contiguous, that concern with the non-utilitarian, become possible to him. The civilized man can not only think but stop to think, whereas 'the savage', as Mr. Clive Bell puts it, 'who stops to think runs a considerable risk of



## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

stopping altogether'.<sup>1</sup> Civilization, in fact, is a device for removing men from the unrestricted incidence of these imperatives. It is unfortunate that in doing so it has subjected him to a scarcely less exacting set prescribed by itself. Patriotism and loyalty claim his sentiments, conscription takes his body; the state of his income and the security of his job occupy his mind. In a word, his relations with and place in society dominate his horizon to such an extent that he tends to lose sight of and interest in his place in and relation to the universe.

Nevertheless, it remains broadly true that the civilized man can and does concern himself with the not immediately present in space and time; the savage rarely and the animal not at all.

### *That Knowledge involves Selection and Interpretation of the Content of Awareness*

To the foregoing excursion into theory of knowledge certain additions must be made and qualifications introduced. I have spoken as if knowledge were an act of awareness by means of which a mind directly perceives and reports upon the 'objects' with which it is confronted. I have suggested that these 'objects' are of different kinds and that some of them are neither in space nor in time. But knowledge is more than direct awareness and reporting.

In the first place, knowledge is an act not only of awareness but of selection. The mind can choose to look 'here' rather than 'there'. This is obviously true at the perceptual level. Of the stimuli to which my body is at any moment exposed, I can choose to attend to some rather than to others; choose to watch the fly on the window pane and not to hear the ticking of the clock; choose to attend to the words on the page I am reading and not to the aching of my tooth. It is no less obviously true when in thinking I resolve to direct my mind upon one set of 'objects' rather than upon another; to study history rather than science; to think about public problems rather than about private worries. If the activity of knowing is like a searchlight which the self turns upon the not-self, it is a searchlight which can be directed by the

<sup>1</sup> In his book, *Civilization*.

## · ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

will in one direction rather than in another. Thus, knowing is not a passive but an active process directed by will.

Secondly, and more importantly, the activity of knowing does not cease with directed awareness. There is interpretation of that which awareness reveals. I touch something soft and fluffy in the dark; I *interpret* it as the hearthrug or the cat. I see a pinkish patch surmounting an oblong black shape with a white centre; I *interpret* it as the face of my friend, wearing evening dress; I hear a throbbing sound; I *interpret* it as the engine of my car or as the engine that runs the electric light plant.

I am standing here on the edge of a bog of controversy in which philosophers have wandered during a considerable part of the twentieth century to no very good purpose. I have wandered there myself with, perhaps, less effect than most.<sup>1</sup> What, we have wanted to know, is the relation between the soft 'something', the pink patch and the throbbing sound on the one hand, and the rug, the face and the engine on the other? Do I ever feel rugs, see faces and hear engines, or do I only feel fluffy 'somethings', see pink patches and hear throbbing sounds? If the latter, do I construct rugs, faces and engines, supplying the parts that I do not sense from the actual data that I do? If so, how can I tell that the part that I am supplying is accurately supplied and the resultant object accurately constructed? Many perceptions are, after all, 'erroneous'. These and many similar questions have been endlessly debated and most philosophers would agree that no completely satisfactory set of answers has been given to them. I propose to shirk them here, contenting myself with establishing one point.

That we do, in fact, interpret the data of which we are directly aware is, I think, certain. We cannot, however, tell, from an inspection of our actual experience, where the activity of direct awareness ceases and that of interpretation begins. It seems probable that the interpretation is, as it were, there from the outset; probable that we never perceive a mere 'that' but always and from the first perceive the 'that' as a 'somewhat', as having, that is to say, qualities which we recognize as belonging to the categories of

<sup>1</sup>In my *Matter, Life and Value* and in *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

'soft', 'fluffy', 'pink', 'black', and 'throbbing'. The moment in which we sense the 'that' as having qualities is logically and, it may be, chronologically prior to the moment when we recognize the nature of the object to which the 'that' which has the qualities belongs. There may, that is to say, be an interval of time, finite though short, between our sensing of the felt 'something' as 'fluffy', of the patch as 'pink', of the shape as 'black' and of the sound as 'throbbing' and between our concluding that it is the 'rug', 'the friend's face' and the 'motor' to which the felt 'something', the pink patch, the black shape and the throbbing sound respectively belong, or of which they form part.

But 'concluding' is not always and necessarily the right word for what we do. I do not always consciously deduce that because the pink patch is of a certain shade and the dark shape of such and such dimensions, therefore it is my friend and not John Smith that I am seeing. In fact, it is rarely that I do this. The recognition that it *is* my friend is usually simultaneous with the recognition of the patch as pink and the shape as dark and as possessing certain dimensions; it is, that is to say, usually instantaneous. Yet, even so, the activity of interpretation must be supposed to have taken place.

The point I wish to establish is that, when we interpret, we do not necessarily move away from the external reality which we have perceived in the sense of supplying something that is not there; we do not, that is to say, first have a sensory experience and then infer an 'object'. The experience *is* the apprehending of the object and the activity of interpretation is present in the process of apprehension from the first.

### *That to Think is not to Move Away from Reality*

Similarly, with what is usually termed conceptual knowledge, that is, the knowledge of 'objects' which are not spatially or temporally present to the knower. In conceptual knowledge, the part which in perceptual knowledge is played by what I have called interpreting is taken over by the activity of reflecting, and to reflect is to think. Now, thinking is not necessarily any more than is interpreting a moving away from the 'object' in the sense

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

of interposing our own ideas between the mind and the 'object' thought about, though, of course, it may be. It may also be a process of entering more deeply into the 'object'. This is obviously true of the thinking of the scientist and of the historian. Because they think about the facts that form their subject matter, it does not follow that they are travelling away from the subject matter into the realm of their own speculations and fancies. They may be, and in fruitful thinking they are further exploring the character of the 'objects' which they began by directly apprehending, distinguishing them from and correlating them with other 'objects'. To think, then, is not necessarily to pass away from the 'objects' which confront the mind ; it may be to acquire further information about them, to enter, if I may venture on a metaphor, more deeply into their nature. This, I suggest, is true of thinking about morals, about art and about God, in just the same way and for the same reason as it is true of thinking about science and about history.

### *Conclusion in Regard to Thinking, Appreciating and Behaving*

This brings me to the conclusion that I am anxious to establish. To admit that knowledge is something more than a process of direct apprehension, that it is also an interpretation of and a thinking about that which is apprehended and that in so interpreting and 'thinking about' we go beyond what is directly given to us, does *not* entail the conclusion that in so going beyond we are leaving the 'object' behind and substituting for it as 'object' our own thoughts and reflections. Thinking, if performed correctly, is a process which tells us more about the reality which we take to be the object of our thinking ; not a process which substitutes the self and its experiences for the reality which occasions them. To admit, then, that thinking involves more than directly apprehending is not tantamount to an admission that thinking involves a 'dropping of the object'. What is true of 'to think' is also true of 'to appreciate', where beauty is the 'object', to have insight, where truth and goodness are the 'objects' and to enjoy spiritual experience, where God is the 'object'.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITY OF KNOWING

This conclusion has a bearing also upon conduct. We used to be taught that if we thought about how we behaved, we should be likely to behave better; that, in short, principles could be applied in practice. We were also taught that some knowledge of the principles that underlie *political* action would enable us to engage in it with greater credit to ourselves and benefit to others. These beliefs have been largely abandoned, partly, I hold, owing to the prevalence of the view that in thinking we are somehow moving away from what is variously called 'concrete reality', 'hard facts' or even 'practical reality'; owing, in other words, to the supposition that thinking involves what in my formula I have called a 'dropping of the object'. The results of this abandonment are all too visibly and lamentably before us. Hence, this abstract discussion of the nature of the processes involved when the mind apprehends anything has, I suggest, an important practical application. If I am right, the more we think about metaphysics, about morals and about politics, the better we are likely to behave and to be governed.

## CHAPTER VII

# A Criticism of Subjectivism in Logic, in Morals and in Aesthetics

In a previous chapter<sup>1</sup> I described the subjectivist analysis of judgement, drew attention to its prevalence and indicated its relevance to my main theme. I propose here briefly to summarize a criticism of this analysis which I have developed in greater detail in other connections.<sup>2</sup>

The subjectivist analysis of judgement is prevalent in the spheres of morals and aesthetics. Briefly it takes the form of analysing the judgement 'I perceive X to be beautiful' into 'I enjoy a feeling of appreciation when I look at X'; 'I think Y to be right' into 'I have a feeling of moral approval when I contemplate Y'. 'A subjective theory of judgement' is, thus, one which, in Professor Broad's definition—he is defining it in relation to ethics—'would make all ethical judgements to consist of statements by the speaker about his own mental attitude towards an object at the time of speaking'. In effect, then, it substitutes a judgement about the experience of the judger for a judgement about the object and is a particular case and potent cause of what I have called the 'dropping of the object'. I propose to offer three criticisms of this analysis.

### 1. THAT THE SUBJECTIVIST ANALYSIS LOGICALLY IMPLIES SOLIPSISM

If, when I purport to make judgements about external objects, including aesthetic 'objects', such as pictures, poetry and music and moral 'objects', such as the behaviour of citizens and States,

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iv, pp. 104–7.

<sup>2</sup> See my *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, chapter xi, and *Philosophy for Our Times*, chapter viii.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

I am, in fact, as the subjectivist analysis maintains, judging about my own states of mind, it is difficult to see what limits can logically be assigned to this mode of analysis. Let us, for example, suppose that I judge that this picture is square, or is heavy, or is framed. What answer, given the subjectivist analysis of moral and aesthetic judgements, can be made to the suggestion that what I am really saying is, 'I experience certain feelings of weight when I hold, and of squareness when I look at, the picture', and 'I entertain a certain view as to its physically contiguous environment'?

Let us term the physical qualities and characteristics possessed by the picture  $X^1$ ,  $X^2$ ,  $X^3$  and so on. The subjectivist analysis requires us to maintain in regard to each of these qualities and characteristics that what seems at first sight to be a statement to the effect that such a quality exists and that the picture has it, is, in truth, a statement to the effect that I am experiencing a certain sensation. The effect of this analysis, if pushed to its logical conclusion, would seem to be that I never succeed in making an assertion about the picture at all.

I may of course be driven to admit that the picture exists as an X which is the *cause* of or which *produces* these various sensations of mine, sensations which I subsequently and erroneously attribute to it as the qualities  $X^1$ ,  $X^2$ ,  $X^3$ , but, even if it does exist, such an underlying X must, I shall insist, remain unknown to me, since every quality that I *think* I perceive in it, every fact that I *think* I know about it will turn out on analysis not to be a quality of, or a fact about the picture, but a quality of, or a fact about my sensations.

But am I logically entitled even to assert the existence of an unknown X? For to judge that there is an X which is the unknown cause of my sensations is to judge that I know something about X independently of my sensations, which, on the subjectivist analysis, I am not entitled to do. Hence, on the basis of this analysis, even that minimal knowledge of X which is involved in saying 'I know X to be the cause of my sensations' must be treated as a statement to the effect that I am holding certain opinions or experiencing certain sensations.

It would seem, then, that if the subjectivist analysis is pushed to its logical conclusion, *all* judgements about the picture must

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

turn out to be assertions to the effect that the judger is experiencing certain sensations or is entertaining certain opinions. What is true of the judgements I make about the picture will also be true of the judgements made about any other 'object'. Thus, if the analysis is pushed to its logical conclusion, I can make assertions only about my own mental states. Hence, for I know to the contrary, I and my mental states are the sole constituents of the universe. This position, which is usually known as Solipsism may be true, but it is not widely held, nor would most of those who adopt the subjectivist analysis of moral and aesthetic judgements be willing to subscribe to it.

I propose, then, to put to those who embark upon this analysis a question. 'If you do not wish to maintain Solipsism, will you provide me with a principle which will enable me to distinguish judgements about the *aesthetic* qualities and properties of the picture from judgements about the qualities and properties  $X^1$ ,  $X^2$ ,  $X^3$ , so that, referring to the principle, I shall be justified in saying that, while the aesthetic judgements are subjective, the judgement to the effect that the picture has the qualities  $X^1$ ,  $X^2$ ,  $X^3$  are objective in the sense that they assert that the picture really *has* the properties and qualities in question?' In answer to this question two grounds of distinction might be offered. It might be said in the first place that if the property  $X^1$  is length or breadth or height, then it is measurable and its possession by the picture is consequently verifiable. Thus, if I judge that the picture measures 4" x 5", it might be said that my judgement was objective because when subjected to the test of measurement the picture actually gave this result. It might be said, in the second place, that in the case of certain qualities and properties, we can in certain circumstances predict that objects will have them. Thus, my judgement that a particular combination of oxygen and hydrogen will have the property of wetness is, it may be said, objective, because it enables me to predict what properties, given the right combination of elements, will characterize their product.

In contradistinction to measurable and predictable qualities, it is pointed out, first, that beauty is not measurable and that its possession, therefore, by a work of art is not verifiable, and, secondly, that its occurrence cannot be predicted. Thus, there



## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

is a recipe for making square frames but none for making beautiful pictures to go into them. Hence, it is said, in the case of the beauty which is attributed to the picture feeling and feeling alone is both the ground for the attribution and the test of its veracity; now feeling which, after all, is personal and private, *must* be subjective.

I have already referred to the first of these distinctions in chapter iv<sup>1</sup> and tried to indicate its bearing on the question at issue. The distinction admittedly exists; what is in question is its relevance. Neither of these distinctions, I now suggest, means more than it asserts. What the distinctions assert is that the difference between the frame case and the water case on the one hand and the aesthetic case on the other is that in the case of the frame and the water the qualities which are attributed to them by judgement can be measured and predicted, but that in the case of the beautiful picture they cannot. But the fact that they cannot is not *in itself* a reason for asserting that the beauty of the picture is subjective. Consider, for example, the case in which a number of people are asked to guess the temperature of a room. They will probably all guess differently and their different guesses will be determined by their subjective circumstances, that is to say, by conditions prevailing in themselves. Thus, if a man has just come out of a hot-house, he will judge the temperature of the room to be lower than if he had just emerged from a refrigerator. Now, it so happens that the temperature of the room can be measured by a thermometer and, when the measurement has been made, one of the guesses can be shown to be more correct than the other. But before thermometers were invented, there were no means of accurately gauging temperature and so of distinguishing between the two guesses. In other words, the amount of heat which belonged to the room independently of the guesses which were made about it could not be established, and the guesses could not, therefore, be verified. Are we, then, to suppose that the judgement, 'the temperature of the room is so and so', was a subjective judgement before there were thermometers but became objective when they were invented?

Nor is it true to say that personal feeling is the only criterion in aesthetics. In the case of many first-rate works of art there is an

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iv, p. 105.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

impressive consensus of opinion to the effect that they are, in fact, first-rate. Moreover, this consensus is not confined to one generation but persists over long periods. Thus, we *know* that Beethoven's music is 'great' in a sense in which the most recent light music 'hit' is not. We also *know* that it will continue to be acclaimed, when the contemporary musical success is forgotten.

I conclude that the two suggested grounds of distinction, that, namely, in terms of verifiability and that in terms of predictability, are not satisfactory methods of distinguishing between objective and subjective judgements. Nor, indeed, has any satisfactory principle of distinction between the objective judgement, 'this frame is square', and the so-called subjective judgement, 'this picture is beautiful', ever been offered. In its absence I venture to put another question: If it be agreed—and most people do agree—that the judgement 'this picture has the qualities  $X^1$ ,  $X^2$ ,  $X^3$ ' is an objective judgement—it may, of course, be incorrect but its possible incorrectness is not here to the point—'will you provide me with a principle which would justify me in asserting that the judgement that the picture has the quality of being beautiful *must* be a subjective judgement'?

Failing the production of such a principle, I insist that no good reason has been adduced for holding that aesthetic judgements *must* be subjective. If I am justified in holding that the judgement, 'the picture is square', says something about the picture, then it cannot be shown that I am not justified in taking the same view in regard to the judgement, 'the picture is beautiful'. This conclusion holds even if the judgement is false and in making it I am attributing to the picture a beauty which it does not possess. The conclusion also holds even if there is no way of demonstrating whether the judgement is true or is false.

### *Application of the Argument to Ethical Judgements*

In so far as this conclusion is valid, its validity applies both to aesthetic and to moral judgements. The conclusion has, however, as it seems to me, a special force in its application to ethical judgements which I will try to make clear.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Saw for the following argument.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

If my analysis of moral judgements is such as to dispense with the 'object', it is clear that my moral judgements cannot have the same 'objects' as those of other people. Thus, if A and B judge that X has the quality Y, they are not passing judgements about the same object; A is passing a judgement about his opinions or experiences; B about his. There is, then, no *common* object of judgement. Applying this result to ethics, we get the result that when I judge that X is good or is bad, I am in fact making a judgement about my own mental states. Similarly, if I judge that X is suffering or is in trouble, I am also making a judgement about my own mental states; for, on this view, I cannot tell what experiences X may have since, whenever I try to make a statement about them, I find that I am talking only about my own. There is, then, on this view, no logical basis for fellow feeling or for sympathetic emotion. Hence, when I extend sympathy to somebody who is in trouble, I might just as well, so far as the logic of the matter goes, extend congratulation. Why, then, it may be asked, do many people concur in feeling sympathy on hearing of X's misfortune, instead of rejoicing at it?

### *Logical Refutation of Solipsism*

For the benefit of readers who have a taste for logic, I venture to suggest a logical refutation of Solipsism. If the doctrine is true, there cannot, so far as I can see, be any reason for thinking it to be so. For consider the judgement, 'Solipsism is true'. This purports to be a judgement about facts; it says, in effect, 'that Solipsism is true is a fact'. Similarly, in regard to any argument that purports to be an argument *for* the fact. One judges, presumably, if one is a believer in Solipsism, 'this is an argument for the fact that Solipsism is true'.

But if Solipsism is true, then all judgements make assertions about our own mental states; indeed, they must do so, since there is nothing else to which they can refer. They do not, therefore, make assertions about external facts or even about arguments, since a mental state is not an argument. Therefore, if Solipsism is true, I cannot judge truly that it is a fact that Solipsism is true, or that that which purports to be an argument for the fact is in

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

truth an argument for it. I can judge only that I *think* it to be a fact, or I *think* it to be an argument for the fact; and my judgements must be of this kind precisely because, if Solipsism is true, then *ex hypothesi* thoughts cannot refer to anything other than our own mental states; therefore, if Solipsism is true, I cannot know that it is, nor can I know any arguments for it.

It must be admitted, however, that this argument against Solipsism depends for its validity upon the acceptance of the correspondence theory of truth described in chapter ix.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. THAT THE GREATNESS OF WORKS OF ART CANNOT BE ASSESSED BY COUNTING HEADS

If the subjectivist analysis of moral and aesthetic judgements is correct, either it means nothing to say that one judgement is truer or more accurate than another, or it means merely that the one judgement is made by numerically more persons than another. If the first interpretation is the right one, the commonly accepted view that there can be such a thing as good taste in regard to art and good judgement in regard to character and conduct is meaningless, and one man's opinion on such matters is as good as another's, the child's as good as the adult's, the idiot's as the sage's, the savage's as the civilized man's.

As to this, it should be sufficient to say that nobody believes it.

If the second is the right interpretation, we can assess aesthetic excellence by counting heads since when we say 'this picture is better than that', what we mean is that more people experience feelings of approbation in looking at this picture than at that one. For if to judge that a picture is beautiful means merely that the judger enjoys looking at it, then, presumably, the more enjoyment, the more beauty. As to this, it should again be sufficient to say that, whatever may be the right method of establishing the excellence of works of art and the moral worth of forms of conduct, nobody does, in fact, believe that you can establish them by counting heads.

<sup>1</sup>See chapter ix, pp. 221, 222.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

I add the obvious consideration that if you could, most admittedly great works of art must be concluded to have little merit or none, since comparatively few of the human beings who have lived upon the earth have liked them. Consider, for example, Schubert's posthumous sonatas, the Art of Fugue, King Lear or Cézanne's pictures, each and all of which when they were first offered to the public evoked either violent disapprobation or complete indifference. It is a commonplace that revolutionary art—and most great art begins by being revolutionary—seems outrageous to its contemporaries on its first appearance. For example, we know the Eroica to be a greater work than Beethoven's First and Second Symphonies, yet the Eroica was greeted with bewildered and angry criticism because it broke new ground. Again, nobody thinks that Beethoven's posthumous Quartets are condemned by reason of the fact that they were in advance of public taste when they were composed, while nobody who knows anything about the history of art believes that the fact that they are still completely meaningless to musically uneducated people detracts from their greatness, any more than he would accept Sir William Richmond's assertion in 1910 that Roger Fry 'must not be surprised if he is boycotted by decent society' for his misdemeanour in organizing an exhibition of the pictures of Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso and Van Gogh, as constituting a serious criticism of the works of these great painters. In short, we all of us know perfectly well that to judge of a work of art that it is great is not the same as to judge that most people in all ages, or in any age, or in the age in which it happened first to appear, have enjoyed it.

What, then, does it mean? I am not here concerned to answer this question; I am content to point out that, if we reject the subjectivist analysis, we have no alternative but to conclude that the judgement that a work of art is great conveys an assertion to the effect that the work of art possesses a certain quality or qualities in its own right, irrespective of what people happen or have happened to think or to feel about it. It is, then, a judgement about an 'object'.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

### 3. HOW DID THE DISTINCTION ENTAILED BY THE USE OF THE WORDS 'GOOD' AND 'BEAUTIFUL' ARISE?

If the correct analysis of 'this is beautiful' is 'this is appreciated by me', the correct analysis of 'this is good', 'this wins my moral approval', or 'the approval of most people at any time', or 'of most people now living', or 'of the governing class that prescribes the moral code and sets the moral standard of its age'—the point here at issue remains the same, whichever of the many varieties of Subjectivism we adopt—it is difficult to see how the distinction between 'beautiful' and 'appreciated by me', or 'good' and 'approved of' came to be made; how, in short, the words 'beautiful' and 'good' ever came to be used with their apparently distinctive meanings.<sup>1</sup>

There is not the slightest doubt that we do, in practice, habitually make this distinction. 'This,' we say, 'is beautiful' or 'good, although I personally don't happen to like it.' (For the phrase 'we say' I ought, perhaps, to substitute 'all reasonably intelligent and educated persons have learnt to say'.) They say similarly, 'this is what I should *like* to pursue because it is pleasant, or to do because it is expedient, although that is what I *ought* to pursue or to do because it is right'.

Now it cannot be doubted that when we say these things, we do mean something by them.

#### *Subjectivist Accounts of the Origins of Moral and Religious Judgements*

Many explanations of what it is that we *do* mean when we say 'right' or 'good' have been put forward in support of Subjectivism by psychologists, anthropologists and others, explanations which take the familiar subjectivist form of maintaining that I am not, in fact, asserting of X that it has the objective

<sup>1</sup>I have elaborated this point at length elsewhere. See my *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, chapter ix.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

quality of moral value when I say that it is good, or of Y that it is invested with moral authority which is independent of any attitude I may happen to have to it, when I say that it ought to be done. But these only have the effect of putting back in time the difficulty with which the subjectivist analysis is faced. For what these explanations are saying is something like this—I take my example from morality; the point in regard to aesthetics is similar: ‘I am descended by traceable stages from a primitive community in which certain kinds of conduct were encouraged because they possessed survival value both in the individual and in the tribe, for example, loyalty, courage, obedience and endurance. Other kinds of conduct, for example, cowardice, treachery, self-will, impiety, originality—and also, perhaps, lying and dishonesty—undermined the security of the tribe and rendered the individual a less valuable member of it. These kinds of conduct were, therefore, discouraged. Encouragement and discouragement were meted out in the tangible forms of reward and punishment; they also took the less tangible forms of approval and popularity and of disapproval and ostracism. The process of reward and punishment, the habit of praising and blaming, thus initiated continued for centuries until the valuations involved ultimately became stamped into the common consciousness of the race and appeared in the remote descendants of the primitive community as inherited instincts.

‘Hence arise our own feelings of moral approval and disapproval, of guilt and remorse; hence, too, our instinctive conviction in regard to certain things that they are right and ought to be done and in regard to other things that they are wrong and ought not to be done. Thus, we come to endow ‘objects’ such as modes of behaviour and the characters of persons with moral qualities of rightness and wrongness which we conceive them to possess in their own right, having forgotten the reasons, the plain utilitarian reasons, which led our ancestors to approve or to disapprove of them. These reasons can, however, usually be uncovered by psychological analysis and anthropological research. Similarly, we think that certain things ought to be done and so are led to invoke moral imperatives and to erect absolute standards, oblivious of the motives, the straightforward social motives, which originally induced our ancestors to approve of their being done. As an example,

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

we may cite the encouragement of the qualities of meekness, contentment and unselfishness in the poor, because their exercise conduces to the maintenance of the power and social position of the governing classes which encourage and prescribe them.' The analysis will be familiar to those who are acquainted with Marxist, anthropological or psycho-analytic literature, and I need not here multiply examples. Similar considerations are adduced to explain religion and to account for the belief in God. We are asked to contemplate savage man lonely and afraid, the prey of uncontrollable and incomprehensible forces, wandering a puzzled and frightened stranger in a world he did not make and cannot understand. How natural that he should invent for his comfort and assurance helping figures, figures of power and friendliness—friendliness to himself and tribe, powerful against personal enemies and other tribes—project them on to the canvas of a meaningless universe and proceed to worship and invoke the assistance of the figures he himself has invented and projected precisely in order that they might be worshipful and helpful.

### *Criticism of the Subjectivist Account*

I have three objections to urge against this kind of explanation which appears in modern thought in many different forms. (i) In the first place, its effect is to put back in point of time the problem which it purports to explain. The difficulty to which, I have suggested, the subjectivist position is exposed was, how does the distinction between 'good' and 'approved of by me' arise? If to say of an action that 'it is good' is equivalent to saying 'I feel approval of it because it is expedient, or useful', how, I asked, does it come about that this distinction between 'good' on the one hand and 'expedient' or 'useful' on the other was ever made? The answer that has been suggested is, 'it is made now because my remote ancestors felt approval for certain kinds of conduct and character'. And if I ask, 'why did they feel this approval?', I am told that it is because they regarded the approved kinds of conduct and character as expedient.

Did my ancestors, then, *never* say 'good', 'right' and 'ought', and *always* say 'expedient', 'useful', and 'desirable'? It is reasonably



## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

certain that they did use the former expressions. Savages, we are assured, exhibit an acutely developed moral consciousness and pass abundant and extensive moral judgements. But, even if they did not, the distinction which I am stressing must at some time or other have been introduced, since I, in common with everybody else, do now make it. How, then, I ask, did it ever come to be introduced if 'expedient' or 'useful' on the one hand and 'good' and 'right' on the other mean in the long run the same thing, if, in fact, there is no distinction to make? I do not distinguish one from one, hot from hot, useful from useful, or good from good.

I conclude that the fact that I explicitly make this distinction entails that by the word 'right' I do not mean the same as by the word 'expedient', and that when I say, 'this is right and ought to be done', I do not mean merely, 'this is approved of by me because it will conduce to my advantage', nor do I mean any of the variants of this expression which I have mentioned.

(ii) *The Argument from Origins*. The argument under consideration is further guilty of a familiar confusion between the origin of moral judgements and their validity. Let us suppose that we provisionally accept the account of the origin of moral and religious judgements which I have summarized. We will suppose, then, that ethical and religious judgements were originally dictated by non-ethical and non-religious considerations.<sup>1</sup> (I have just urged that this is not the case; it is only for the purposes of argument that I am here assuming that it *is* the case.) What bearing has the fact, if it is a fact, upon their present validity? Why, for example, because religion began as exogamy, fear and propitiation—granting for the moment that it did so begin—should it be assumed that it is still in essence fear and propitiation and not, therefore, religion now? Nobody denies that religion has developed since its earliest recorded beginnings, or that the religious consciousness of the civilized man is different from and richer than that of the savage.

The implication of the argument is, presumably, that *because* the religious consciousness of the savage is in essence fear and

<sup>1</sup> See for an illustration of this mode of explanation in its bearing on the origin of religion chapter iv, pp. 115, 116.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

propitiation, *therefore* the more developed religious consciousness of the civilized man is still in essence what the savage's began by being.

But consider the parallel case of the developing mathematical consciousness. The savage, we are assured, can count only on the fingers of one hand; but nobody regards the fact as in some way invalidating our knowledge of the multiplication table. Similarly, it would be generally agreed that the fact that Einstein was once a fish-like embryo and that his neck still contains the rudiments of gill slits affords us little information about the mind of Einstein now.

If there is any substance in the notion of development, development must mean that there is more in the fruits than in the roots, more in the man than there was in the child, more in the developed moral consciousness of a twentieth-century adult than in the tribal taboos of the savage, more in the civilized man's relation to and awareness of God than in the primitive's intimations of an unknown. Now, it may well be the case that it is precisely in this 'more' that the transition from subjectivity to objectivity is concealed. In sum, the fact that the earliest beginnings of the ethical consciousness are susceptible of analysis—if they are—on subjectivist lines, does not entail the consequence that its fully developed contemporary version is also susceptible.

(iii) *The Ambiguity in regard to Self-Interest.* By resolving morality into expediency—we approve of certain moral qualities, the argument maintains, because their possession and manifestation by a person, a class or a society is useful to ourselves—the argument seems to suggest that all motives and actions are at bottom selfish. Such is, indeed, the basic contention of the ethical view known as Egoism. On this view, the purpose of everything that we do or plan or think is to gratify the self.

But to say that all actions are self-interested begs the point at issue by implying that all forms of self-interest are the same. Suppose that I serve my purposes and gratify my self-interest by appreciating beauty because it is beautiful, pursuing truth because truth inspires and draws me to it, and cultivating virtue because I want and, further, *will* to be a better man, or because I feel the pull of moral obligation. No doubt these sentiments and motives of mine all fall within the framework of the

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

formula for self-interest if we choose to use the term widely enough. But it does not, therefore, follow that these motives and sentiments may be appropriately classed with the direct pursuit of personal advantage or the exclusive gratification of personal desire which we normally associate with selfishness, as if they were all on the same footing. In other words, the similarity of grammatical form between 'I *want* money or food or sex because they gratify my desires' and 'I *want* to be a better man because goodness attracts me or inspires me' disguises a total difference of content. The refusal to distinguish the different forms of interest that attract, the different kinds of 'object' that gratify the self, with a resultant confusion between the appetites on the one hand and intellectual activity, aesthetic enjoyment and moral obligation on the other, constitutes a conspicuous example of the effects of the 'dropping of the object'.

*Conclusion: that Moral Judgements Refer to Independent 'Objects' whose Existence they Entail*

If the meaning of the terms 'right' and 'good' cannot in their application to conduct and character be adequately analysed in terms of the attitude of my mind to the conduct or character in question, or of any mind, or of any body of minds, what alternative is there but to conclude that the characteristics to which the words 'right' and 'good' refer are attributes not of the minds of the persons judging and approving, but of the 'objects' judged and approved? If this is the case, when I say 'this is right' or 'this is good', I do mean precisely what I purport to mean, namely, that 'this' possesses in its own right an ethical attribute. Perhaps I had better once again make the point that I may be wrong in this attribution, holding things to be 'good' when they are not and demanding that something 'ought' to be done since it is 'right' when, in fact, it is not 'right' and there is no obligation to do it. But the obvious fact that I can and frequently do make mistakes in my moral judgements, asserting 'good' where good is absent, and failing to notice it when it is present, is no more valid a reason for thinking that my judgements never refer to an 'object' other than myself, than the fact that I can get sums wrong is a reason for

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

concluding that when I 'do arithmetic', I am not thinking about figures but am thinking about the operations of my own mind.

### *Irrelevance of Variety of Moral Opinions and Valuations*

It is, I hope, scarcely necessary to point out that the bewildering variety of the moral and aesthetic judgements which have been made by human minds in the past and are still made in the present does not affect the issue. It is, indeed, a fact, as we are constantly being told, that human beings have at different times thought all manner of things to be 'right' and 'wrong', and to be 'beautiful' and 'ugly' and that their thoughts on these matters have frequently been contradictory at the same time. As Dr. Rashdall puts it in his book, *The Theory of Good and Evil*, 'there is hardly a vice or a crime (according to our own moral standard) which has not at some time or other in some circumstances been looked upon as a moral and religious duty'.

It is also a fact that what men *do* think on these topics is manifestly determined by non-ethical circumstances such as personal need and ambition, social expediency, cultural level of the community to which they belong and so forth. For example, most Englishmen thought most Germans wicked between 1939-45 because they desired to beat them in the war.

But the whole endeavour of the preceding argument has been to draw a distinction between the judgement which is passed and that which the judgement is passed about, between the thought that a particular action is right or wrong and the action to which the thought refers. It is to the former, that is to say, to men's thoughts and judgements, that historical circumstances touching the variety of moral opinions and aesthetic valuations are relevant, not to the latter. Indeed, unless we did mean something by the words 'right', 'wrong', 'good', 'bad', 'beautiful', 'ugly', which meaning was *not* wholly analysable into our thoughts and judgements about conduct and works of art, it is difficult to see to what our thoughts and judgements could refer.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

### *Exaggeration of Variety of and Changes in Ethical Judgements*

I have so far accepted the view summarized in the quotation from Dr. Rashdall that the moral judgements of mankind are and always have been widely divergent. I have confined myself to pointing out that this fact—if, indeed, it is a fact—is irrelevant to the issue under discussion which is not whether moral judgements often differ but whether they can ever be objective.

It is, however, permissible to wonder whether the changes and divergences in ethical valuation are as great as subjectivists commonly maintain.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt wide divergence between particular moral judgements, but it is far from clear that there is an equal divergence about the universal principles and values which the judgements imply. That honesty is better than dishonesty, kindness than cruelty, justice than injustice, are truths to which, I should have thought, nearly all peoples have at nearly all times subscribed. Disagreement arises as to the particulars by which these universals are exemplified, as to whether, for example, this particular act is dishonest, or as to whether kindness extended to this person *now* may not involve greater unkindness to this or to some other person later, or as to whether some degree of injustice may not be justified in this particular case in order to maintain our general respect for accepted rules of law. Now, when it comes to making judgements about particulars, particular circumstances do, of course, have great weight and very often decide the issue in a sense which seems at first sight to be contrary to the obvious deliverances of the universal values which are commonly accepted.

An example frequently quoted in support of the apparent chaos of ethical judgements and valuations and, therefore, of the view that these judgements are subjective, is the fact that in many societies the killing of aged persons has been considered a moral duty. But the valuation that this judgement implies must, I suggest, be considered in the context of its particular setting, the setting, namely, of the necessity which is imposed upon many

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for this argument to Dr. Saw.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

primitive, and especially upon primitive nomadic peoples, of moving freely in search of food.

It is obvious that cases might arise in which, unless those whose age or weakness caused a check upon the community's rapid movement were removed, the whole community might starve. The same consideration applies to the killing of young infants. But it does not follow from these examples that old people ought to be killed *now*. For our moral consciousness now operates in the context of a different set of circumstances. The effect of killing the old and feeble now would be not to free the tribe from the danger of mass starvation but to relieve the young of the task of taking up meals to bedrooms. A modern situation equivalent to that with which the primitive community is faced would arise from the bombing of an institution containing an old people's ward. The question that confronts the rescuers is, whither shall we first direct our efforts at rescue; to the wing containing the old people or to that part of the building which houses the able-bodied members of the community? The decision to go to the help of the able-bodied first may well be tantamount to a death sentence upon the old, but although the decision is deliberately taken, it does not entail the ethical judgement, it is right that old people should be killed. The truth is that the killing of old people cannot be considered in isolation from the context of circumstance. When it is so considered, it may well be the case that instead of being faced with two divergent moral judgements on the same issue, as the example at first suggests, we are confronted quite simply with two different moral issues. The first issue is, should the community as a whole run the risk of starvation? The second, should some young people be given trouble which might otherwise be avoided? To say 'No' to the first and 'Yes' to the second, is not necessarily to subscribe to different moral standards or to pass different moral judgements. In the same way it might be possible to show that many cases of alleged difference of ethical judgement, when viewed within the context of changed circumstances, suggest not so much that moral judgements are different as that circumstances are.

## A CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVISM

### *Summary and Conclusion*

If, on the basis of the foregoing arguments, we grant the objectivity of moral standards and aesthetic values, we shall be disabled by so doing from subscribing to the prevalent habit of dropping the 'object'. We shall, accordingly, be driven to conclude that, when we use such words as 'ideals', 'standards', 'goals', 'ends', 'ought', 'right', 'wrong', 'beautiful', 'ugly', we are not merely talking about our own experiences, but may be referring to objective facts existing as part of the moral and aesthetic order of the universe, by which our experiences are evoked, to which our judgements refer and about which, if they are correct, they give us information. We shall be driven, in other words, to hold that the universe is both moral and aesthetic in its essential nature, or at least contains moral and aesthetic elements.

In the next chapter I shall indicate some of the conclusions which follow from this admission and argue that it is only if we are prepared to postulate such an order that we can discover a logical justification for the training and disciplining of character, for rational choice in conduct and for valuation of works of art in terms of their comparative merits. If no such order is postulated, then there is no such ground. It is in the absence of such a ground, in the resultant belief that beyond our human experience there is nothing and in the resultant view of all experience as having value in itself that, I am suggesting, the common factor in all the multitudinous concepts which we denote by the word 'decadence' is to be found.

## CHAPTER VIII

# Education, Art and Religion as the Revelation of Objective Fact

### *General Principle : (i) Wherein the Excellence of Experience Lies*

I propose in this chapter to examine some of the ways in which what I have called 'the object' contributes, is, indeed, necessary to the full development of personality. I wish to suggest that so far from experience being an end or even a 'good' in itself, experience is valuable only in so far as the self is fertilized and enriched by what is other than the self. I shall suggest, further, that the value of an experience varies in the degree to which it fails to obtrude itself as an object of apprehension and approximates to the condition of a window through which the mind views what I take to be the proper objects of its apprehension, namely, 'objects' which are other than the self. In chapter vi I likened experience to a pane of glass<sup>1</sup> and suggested that just as the excellence of a window lies in the transparency of its panes, so the virtue of experience is the clarity of the vision which it affords of the 'objects' upon which it is directed, a vision obscured by the minimum of impediment from or of colouring by the personality of the experiencer. Experience in short, rightly regarded, is not the 'object', but is the medium through which the mind makes contact with other 'objects'.

The mind is in this sense like an organism ; it grows by crossing with and fertilization by things other than itself. The richest mind is that which is most variously fertilized ; is, in other words, that which makes contact with the greatest variety of fertilizing 'objects'. This, indeed, would generally be admitted in its application

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vi, pp. 130, 131.



## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

to experience at the sensory level. A deaf man is not fertilized by the beauty of music or a blind man receptive to the beauty of nature; a man dumb from birth is deprived of many of the pleasures and some part of the development which social intercourse engenders. Such men are, we recognize, the poorer in spirit for their deprivation. The same conclusion would be generally admitted in its application to experience at the intellectual level. Because the idiot cannot think straight his mind is, we recognize, poorer than that of the sane man; the mind of the man who is aware of many different ideas and aware of them in their connection, who, as we say, correlates ideas, exceeds in richness the mind of the average sane but non-connecting man.

'Every human mind,' to quote Archbishop Temple,<sup>1</sup> 'is potentially a focusing point for the whole range of possible experience, that is, of the whole universe. . . . Greatness of mind is, therefore, primarily a matter of receptivity.' The more aspects of the universe or, as I have put it, the more 'objects' with which a mind can make contact and of which it can have cognizance, the richer the mind; alternatively, the more intensive the mind's contact with a particular limited area of the given reality, the deeper the mind. Where the range of contact is abnormally extended you get the philosopher and the sage; where there is a special intensity of awareness and contact within a selected area, the creative scientist, the artist and the genius.

### *(ii) The Fertilization of the Self by the Not-Self*

But the contact must be fructifying. Awareness is not enough; there must also be response and interpretation in the sense of interpretation defined in chapter vi.<sup>2</sup>

To resort for a simile to the vegetable world, the plant which is fertilized by adequate manuring first responds to it and, secondly, absorbs it into its being, so that it is changed and enriched by reason of its absorbing. If that is how a plant grows, it is also, I suggest, how a mind grows. In its application to mind the simile is, however, deficient in two respects; first, in the case of a mind, response is not merely a passive reception of external

<sup>1</sup> In *Christus Veritas*.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter vi, pp. 141-3.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

stimuli but is active and entails, therefore, an act of will. It is obvious that we do not derive benefit from great art or, even, from nature unless we *will* to attend to it. Secondly, what in the case of the plant is an incorporation of the given, is in the case of a mind an interpretation of the given, so that what in the end emerges, whether thought or act or work of art, is neither the mind nor the given, but is the offspring of their fertile union. I am suggesting, then, that whatever is valuable in human achievement is the product of the impregnation of the self by the not-self. These considerations are, I daresay, obvious enough. I mention them here in order to throw into relief two points. First, if the 'object' is belittled in theory and played down in practice, the union—though, if I am right, it cannot but in theory occur, since experience is, in fact, always *of* an 'object'—will be less fruitful. The soul, unfertilized from without or, more precisely, indifferent to the external source of its fertilization, will turn in upon itself and feeding upon its own resources will tend mistakenly to identify the ends both of art and life with self-absorption and self-expression. The result will be sterile art and insipid living, will, in fact, be decadence.

Secondly, in order that the union may be most fruitfully achieved, the self must, so far as possible, be eliminated as an 'object' of apprehension. Thus, it is not in self-absorption but in self-forgetfulness that the key both to zestful living and to fruitful reproducing is to be found. To forget the self is—for all that psycho-analysis may say to the contrary—a better recipe for the good life than to know the self.

So much for general principles; I will try to indicate some of their more obvious applications.

### *Application of General Principles: (i) To Education*

If all growth proceeds by way of reaction to an environment, it is, in part, the purpose of education to provide the right environment. Since mental growth, like bodily, depends upon the reception of nourishment from without, the mind like the body will be largely, some have said wholly, formed by the 'food' it absorbs. For this reason, those who have laid down the principles of

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

educational theory have stressed the importance of environment. Put a child among harmonious sights and sounds, says Plato, and his soul, taking colour from its environment, will become harmonious and graceful even as they are; the converse is, of course, equally true.

For Aristotle, the training of character precedes the training of intellect and for the training of character he looked chiefly to environment. It is our environment which gives us right principles, so that, having been trained in early life to act in accordance with them, we shall form right habits, learning how to do the right thing without knowing at this stage *why* it is right. The knowledge of *why* comes afterwards; comes with the development of intellect, when we are able to understand the grounds of the principles which we have hitherto accepted on trust from our environment and to perform from deliberate choice the acts which because of our training we have previously performed from habit. Thus education is essential to the formation both of ethical principles and aesthetic tastes; it indicates to us what 'objects' we ought to like and what to dislike, what things we should seek after and what eschew. The educational environment, which is to produce this training in right habits, while it includes nature, books, music, pictures and so on, consists primarily of other minds more mature than that of the child.

Now, it is nonsense to say that when the child's mind is in converse with the minds of others, it is only its own experience that it knows. It is brought directly into contact with 'objects', in the shape of ideas and principles, through intercourse with which it is fertilized and grows to its adult stature. It is no less mistaken to suppose that the child's part in this intercourse is limited to a passive receptivity. He absorbs what he is told, takes it into and makes it part of himself and then actively interprets it, shaping it so that it may fit into the framework of his own intellectual being. This process of interpretation is largely determined by the pre-existing structure of the mind into which the new material must be fitted. There are some minds into whose structure the material cannot be assimilated. There are some things which some children simply cannot learn, just as some adults literally cannot 'take in' mathematics or appreciate poetry. But in no case is the

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

information received unchanged by its reception, since, in the process of being fitted into the pre-existing structure of the receiving mind, it is itself modified in order that the 'fitting' may be effected just as digestion alters the chemical composition of the food which is assimilated. Thus, we never take over other people's ideas; we take over the nearest ideas to them that our minds are capable of receiving. What we give out is still further modified by the colouring imparted to it through the mind's active interpretation of what is taken in. The mind is thus a focus for the reception and reflection of the 'objects' of the external world, but it is never a bare focus; it illuminates what it reflects and the light which it casts is its own.

This subjective element which plays its part in every process of education should not, however, blind us to the facts:

(a) that education is essentially an awareness by the mind of 'objects';

(b) that the more 'objects' of the right kind of which there is awareness, the better the education;

(c) that, as I have pointed out, the mind's interpretation of the 'objects' with which contact is made is not a process of moving away from the 'objects' into a subjective world of private experience, but is a further knowledge, a more accurate discrimination and a deeper penetration into the being of that which is known.

### *Application of General Principles: (ii) To Art*

Among the 'objects' which the universe contains are values. These values are independent of the human minds which know them and unaffected by the mind's apprehension of them. Those which we chiefly know are three, Truth, Goodness and Beauty. I apologize for the dogmatism of these announcements. I do not see how to mitigate it, except by retracing ground that I have already covered at length in other books. I further justify myself by the reflection that the position announced forms part of the *philosophia perennis*, the most continuous tradition in the history of philosophy.

I add that the analysis contained in the last chapter requires as the logical corollary of the view that aesthetic, moral and

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

intellectual experiences are to be interpreted as the mind's awareness of 'objects' external to itself, the conclusion that these 'objects' have value, are, that is to say, such as the mind *ought* to desire and pursue, and that it *ought* so to desire and pursue because it perceives them to be good.

### *Art as the Apprehension of the Value Beauty*

I again venture to emphasize the fact that in the process of apprehension there are two moments ; there is the moment of receptivity and the moment of interpretation. So far as the moment of receptivity is concerned, the more accessible the receiving agent, the more transparent the medium of reception, the better.

It would, I think, be generally agreed that the more satisfying the aesthetic experience, the less does the self enter into it. It seems to me to be palpably false to say that, when we listen to a Mozart Concerto, we are somehow experiencing ourselves, that is to say, our own emotions, our pleasures and our thrills, and not patterns of sound devised by Mozart. I do not, of course, mean that the emotions, the pleasures and the thrills do not occur ; merely that it is not upon them that our experience is directed. In so far as mind enters at all into the content of what is experienced, it is not the mind of the experiencer, but that of Mozart. It is because Mozart's apprehension of beauty is richer and more penetrating than our own that we were unable to discern for ourselves the combinations of sound that he discerned for us. And it is because music is an educator that, listening to Mozart, we are taken, as it were, by the aesthetic hand, raised to the spiritual level which he reached unaided, and there enabled to catch a glimpse of the 'objects' which he first discerned.

### *The Activity of Appreciation; Interposition of the Mind of the Appreciator*

I said above, 'in so far as mind enters at all', it is Mozart's mind not the mind of the listener, when I should have said 'in so far as mind is permitted to enter at all', it *should* be Mozart's, for in practice one's own mind does, of course, enter

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

and enters ubiquitously. It enters to wander and to distract. It reminds us, for example, at a wartime lunch-hour concert at the National Gallery, that we have not yet lunched and are hungry; that the man in front of us is fidgeting; that the young man sitting next to us has tried to take our seat; that the arrangements are faulty in that, though the concerts are intended for war workers, old ladies, who are emphatically not war workers and who have nothing to do with themselves but to get ready to go to the concerts, arrive first and monopolize the best seats; that we have an important appointment in the afternoon; that we tactlessly phrased the letter of remonstrance that we wrote this morning; that 'this' would be a good idea for an article, 'that', a good plan for a book; that the cherub on the cornice is too fat or not fat enough; that we hope that the pictures will not return to occupy the rooms that music has usurped; that—but there is no end to the pranks that the wandering mind plays, the will o' the wisps that it pursues, the fool's errands on which it leads us.

Now it would, I imagine, be generally agreed that, in so far as our minds play these tricks, it is interposing itself between us and the music, substituting for Mozart's Concerto our own experiences as 'object', and, in so doing, impairing our full appreciation of Mozart's Concerto. It follows that we can fully appreciate great art only when we forget and lose ourselves in contemplation and enjoyment of what is other than the self. The value of beauty is appreciated by a subject; but the subject finds this value only when, itself eliminated, it becomes a transparent pane for the revelation of the 'object'.

### *The Activity of 'Creation'. That the 'Creator' is in Truth a Discoverer*

If this is true of the mind of the appreciator, what account can be given of the mind of the creator? Not being a creator, I approach this part of the subject with circumspection. Nevertheless, I venture to suggest that in a true account of the matter it will be found that value, the value beauty, exists as 'object' for the creator no less than for the appreciator, and that what the

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

creator does is to incarnate this 'object' in paint or sound or stone, by making visible or audible representations of it.

On this view all art is, as Plato and Aristotle insist, imitative. Essentially it imitates or represents something; it also expresses, but the expression is incidental to the representation. This view is unfashionable at the present time and I do not know by what method I can most appropriately commend it. Let me begin by avowing my belief that in the strict sense of the word the human mind never 'creates'; it discovers its materials and arranges and rearranges the materials it has discovered.

Take the case of pictorial art. The beauty of the natural world is what it is independently of any human activity of interference or embellishment. It is, of course, true that men have deliberately heightened this beauty by gardening and landscape design or by the planting of trees. In so doing, they have merely arranged in new combinations the materials which nature has provided. So when we paint, we do not invent the objects that we paint. Consider, for example, the furniture of nature; sky and stars and the sun; trees and flowers and the moon; earth and birds and beasts and insects—no one of these could we have imagined for ourselves. Nor could we have imagined for ourselves rain, or have deduced that in certain conditions rain would become snow. Again, what human mind could of itself have conceived water and the wetness of water?

The natural world has specific determination; it contains certain things and not others; it possesses particular specifiable features and qualities and not others. Now neither the painter nor the poet can by virtue of his imaginative ingenuity conceive new features or new qualities; he can only transpose those particular specifiable features and qualities which the natural world presents to his observation. Thus, he can imagine red grass, but he cannot imagine a plant which is neither grass nor any combination of grass and other natural growths; nor can he imagine a colour which is not some combination of existing colours; nor can he put something in the place of the sky, except he select that something from among the other 'objects' that nature offers to him. This conclusion is reinforced by reflection upon the attempts which are sometimes made to picture the flora and fauna of other

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

planets, or of the unknown lands that poets or writers of fantasies have imagined. We find that the pictorial imagination even of the most original poet is confined within the limits of the flora and fauna that he meets upon the earth. He can modify and transpose these, but his modifications and transpositions are limited by the material which nature offers to him. He imagines red grass or beasts with six legs or mermaids or griffins or unicorns or centaurs. All consist of rearrangements and regroupings of the characteristics of the plants and beasts that are given. He does not, because he cannot, think of something which is entirely novel in the sense that no archetype of it exists upon the earth. What, then, is it that the 'creative' poet does? He lets his imagination play upon the objects presented to him and produces combinations of them which do not, in fact, exist. He imagines the loves of the phoenix and the turtle, or 'tigers burning bright', or 'charm'd magic casements . . . in faery lands forlorn'. But all the 'objects' he imagines are in fact given.

Similarly, the painter never invents the 'objects' which he paints; he may alter the qualities of the 'objects' that are given to him; his grass may be red or his sea yellow; he may emphasize certain qualities and ignore others; he may paint things in unfamiliar aspects or from strange angles, or he may put them in unprecedented juxtapositions—'the King and Queen' for example, 'traversed by Swift Nudes' is the title of a recent surrealist picture—but always he represents the 'objects' which are given to him, whether kings and queens and nudes or merely parts of them. When he seems to invent, he is only taking the known aspects of familiar 'objects' and so manipulating them that he produces what appear to be new 'objects'. Or he may arrange a number of coloured shapes in novel patterns. But both the colours and the shapes are given to him, or are combinations of colours and shapes that are given to him.

### *That Pictorial Art is Always Representative*

In this sense all pictorial art is representative. Even when in any obvious sense of the word 'representation' it fails to 'represent' anything at all, but contents itself with the presentation of coloured



## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

shapes, the shapes and colours are inevitably supplied by nature. Moreover, as a matter of historical interest, it will not have escaped notice that the further pictorial art withdraws itself from nature, the less satisfactory are its results. All pictures are from the very nature of the medium pictures *of* something. If the 'something' is not itself found among visible 'objects', but is an artificial selection from and recombination of the qualities and shapes of visible objects, a selection and a recombination designed to produce novel shapes with novel qualities, it tends to be unsatisfactory. This is a way of saying that all great pictures are *of* the things, the forms, the colours and the patterns that we know. It is only minor painters who seek to invent their own 'objects', by recombining in bizarre ways the qualities and properties of the things that exist.

What, then, is it that the artist does? He selects from among the infinite variety of shapes and colours which nature offers those which seem to him to have formal significance, and so presents them that the element of significance is thrown into high relief. Thus the basis of his hold over our emotions is to be found primarily in his feeling for *form*. It is in the forms which he selects and in the patterns and the arrangements that he imposes—these imposed patterns and arrangements being, if I am right, themselves suggested by nature—that the secret of his power lies. For I repeat, even the forms, the patterns and the arrangements are *given*, and the distinctive quality of the great artist lies in his skill in the selection of those which are significant and in the presentation of 'objects' in the forms and patterns he has selected.

What do I mean by significant? The question is one that cannot be answered here.<sup>1</sup>

I suspect, however, that significance is only a synonym for beauty and that, by 'significant forms and patterns', we mean no more and no less than those which are characterized by the quality of being beautiful; or, more precisely, they are those in which the value, beauty, manifests itself. The painter, then, explores the world for the beauty that it contains, finds it, seizes upon it when he finds it, embodies it in paint, and in so doing throws it into relief, disentangling it from the adventitious and obscuring details of the

<sup>1</sup>I have tried to answer it at length in my *Matter, Life and Value*, chapter vi, and *Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science*, chapter x.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

setting in which it was originally presented. His functions are first, discernment, then selection and, finally, reproduction or imitation in paint or stone of what is selected. What, then, it may be asked, assuming that art is discovery and embodiment, does the musician discover and wherein, on this view, does the excellence of music lie?

### *The Case of Music. Preliminary Observation*

At first sight, it must be admitted, the case of music presents greater difficulty.

What I am concerned to show is that the excellence of a musical work does not lie except incidentally in expression, if by expression is meant self-expression. Music, no doubt, expresses the personality of its composer, just as a man's movements and gestures at tennis express his bodily characteristics and express also in their degree the nature of his personality.

Thus, a player may have a suave flowing style; his movements are graceful, his strokes perfectly produced, yet he loses to a clumsy opponent whose style is laborious, whose strokes are angular and whose movements are energy-wasting, simply because the latter's determination is greater and his spirit more enduring; he is inspired, as we say, by a greater 'will to win'. But the excellence of the music no more consists in the fact that it expresses a personality, than the excellence of a man's game consists in the fact that it is the natural expression of the sort of person that he is and the sort of body that he has and not in the fact that his strokes are things of beauty or that they enable him to win. And if the virtue of music does not lie in its ability to express the personality of the composer, still less does it lie in its ability to express the personality of the executant or the conductor.

I am concerned, further, to show that in music, as in painting, that which confers value and is embodied in the structure of the music *as value* is a something discovered and not created, and that music is a reproduction or embodiment of this valuable 'something' which is, as it were *there* to begin with, is, that is to say, prior in time to the process by which it is embodied in the structure of sound. 'There seems to be a sort of relationship', says

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

Aristotle, 'between the soul on the one hand and harmonies and rhythms on the other.' Sir Thomas Browne in his poetical prose gives expression to the same thought when he speaks of music as 'a shadowed lesson of the whole world, such a melody as the whole world, well understood, would afford the understanding'. It is this 'something' which Aristotle calls a relationship between the soul and harmonies and rhythms and Sir Thomas Browne, a shadowed lesson of the world's melody, that the composer discerns; of this 'something' he is aware, aware, first, as an object of discovery and contemplation; aware, secondly, as an object of active interpretation, this interpretation involving, in the case of music, embodiment in concrete structures of physical sound. If I could succeed in showing that the foregoing was in outline a correct description of the true function of the musical composer and the process of musical composition, music would, as the result of the demonstration, have been shown to conform to the general analysis of the cognitive relation in aesthetics suggested in chapter vi.<sup>1</sup>

For it, too, would take its start from and would essentially consist in an awareness by a mind of an 'object' and its specific excellence would be conferred by an 'object'.

It would follow that the 'dropping of the object' and the substitution in music of a doctrine of experience and expression for a doctrine of awareness and discovery would have harmful results. For this doctrine, in so far as it was accepted as true in theory and acted upon in practice, would not only fail to give an account of the great music that has been produced in the past, but it would tend to militate against the production of great music in the present; it would, therefore, constitute a further illustration of the concept of decadence set forth in earlier chapters of this book.

### *The Nature of Sound*

The physical subject matter of music, the raw material of which music is made, is sound. To the question, what is sound, no satisfactory answer can be given. If we consult physics and physiology,

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vi, pp. 134-6.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

we are told that sound consists of the movement of waves through the atmosphere, resulting in disturbances in the membrane of the ear drums; these disturbances originate a set of neural impulses which, passing through the complicated machinery of the middle and inner ears, are thence transmitted, again by purely neural processes, to the brain. We may say, then, if we like, that sound is or consists of atmospheric waves, neural impulses and cerebral events. These presumably are analysable in terms of whatever analysis of matter is fashionable at the moment and may, therefore, be contemporaneously described as the alteration of the position in space-time of charges of positive and negative electricity moving at certain specifiable velocities in certain specifiable directions. This account in terms of physics and physiology could, of course, be almost indefinitely expanded. Yet as none of the occurrences to which I have referred—neither the waves in the atmosphere nor the neural impulses nor the movements of electrical charge—is, presumably, noisy, we ought perhaps to conclude that we are not entitled to speak of *sound* until the mind has been introduced into the account. Sound, in other words, is that which a *mind* (not a *brain*) hears, not necessarily in the sense in which a sound is, as the idealists maintain, an event, that is to say, an idea in the hearing mind, but, as I would prefer to say, in the sense in which a sound is a datum, that is to say a something *given to* the mind. We might, then, define a sound as that kind of object of which, when the appropriate neural machinery has been suitably stimulated, the mind has the kind of awareness which we describe as an aural sensation.

Now, sound is not created by the hearer; it is heard, heard because it is, so to speak, there to be heard. No doubt, if I choose to put down a key on the piano, I may be said to decide *what* sound it is that I shall hear; but my decision does not create the sound; it simply sets up the conditions in which one particular sound out of the total number of sounds that exist for hearing will, in fact, be heard. Sound, in other words, is part of the raw material of the physical world; it is a piece of cosmic furniture, which is there and always has been there in potentiality. It merely awaits the pluck of a finger on a string, the passage of air along a brass tube or wooden

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

cylinder, the impact of the hammers on a wire, to be touched off and brought into actuality.

### *The Structural Anatomy of Music*

Let me illustrate this conception by citing the case of Beethoven. Beethoven appears in the first place to have worked out the general outline of the structure of a piece of music, worked it out, that is to say, as a whole, in much the same way as an architect draws up the general plan of a building. This musical structure may be most appropriately conceived as a skeleton plan or pattern, the contents of which have still to be filled in. He then appears to have tried out the effects of actual combinations of sound, playing alternative phrases many times on the piano, varying them and relating them to the preceding and succeeding phrases, until he found one which fitted in a satisfying manner into the prearranged pattern, much as a coin is fitted into a slot or papers into the pigeon holes of a desk.

When the fit has been effected, Beethoven is said to have 'composed the phrase'. What has he, in fact, done? He has discerned<sup>1</sup> a musical pattern and experimented with sounds until he has hit upon a phrase which fitted the pattern. In other words, his activities are primarily those of discovery, experiment and selection.

An interesting account of this process is contained in Romain Rolland's novel, *Jean Christophe*, where he describes the young Jean as trying out the effects of putting down various notes with his fingers and sampling the results, some of which he selects, others rejects.

Why are some selected, others rejected? Because some seem significant and beautiful; and others do not.

I believe that the notion which the word 'beautiful' expresses is unanalysable. By this I mean that it cannot be broken up as a piece of matter, coal for example, or cheese, or chalk can be broken up into its constituent elements, so that we can say of it that it consists of such and such elements, or as a triangle can be broken up into its component sides and angles in terms of which it can be defined as being this sort of triangle or that. I believe also that it is unique. By saying that it is unique, I mean that we cannot say

<sup>1</sup> The use of the word 'discerned' here is explained on pp. 178, 179 below.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

of it, any more than we can say of space or time or colour, that it is *like* this or that. It is for this reason that, although we recognize beauty when we meet it, we are unable to say what we mean by it. If it is unanalysable and unique, it is also ultimate, in the sense that we cannot go behind it and find something more fundamental of which it is a manifestation<sup>1</sup> or an expression.

Beauty causes pleasure, but it would be misleading to say that one combination of sounds is selected rather than another, *merely* because the hearing of it gives greater pleasure. It is selected because it is thought to be beautiful or seen to be significant—these two words, I have suggested above,<sup>2</sup> are synonyms for the same concept—and it is because it is beautiful or significant that it gives pleasure. Once again, I apologize for the apparent dogmatism of these statements. The grounds on which they are based belong to the general refutation of Hedonism which is familiar to most philosophers and which I have attempted elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

But individual sounds constitute, of course, only a very small part of the significance that we find in music. This significance, as I pointed out in an earlier chapter,<sup>4</sup> is distinctively found in sounds in combination or arrangement. It is of sounds in combination or arrangement that the structure of a piece of music consists. How is one such combination of sounds distinguished from another? A musician would say by melody, by harmony and by rhythm, noting at the same time that rhythm is fundamental in the sense that there can be rhythm without melody, but not melody without rhythm.

It seems to me that, taking rhythm as fundamental in music, we can analyse these specifically musical expressions into others which are more fundamental still in the sense that their meaning extends beyond the sphere of music and is common both to arrangements of sound and to other forms of arrangement. In terms of these more fundamental modes of expression, we can

<sup>1</sup>It may be the case that beauty is a manifestation of deity, but to say that God manifests Himself under the mode of beauty is to say that beauty belongs to deity as an attribute, in which case beauty is ultimate in the sense that there are no more fundamental things of which it is a combination or expression.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>*Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, chapter ix.

<sup>4</sup>See chapter ii, pp. 59–61.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

say that one form of sound arrangement is distinguished from another by three characteristics. There are, first, the sounds actually selected for arrangement; secondly, the order in which they are arranged and, thirdly, the time intervals between them. Thus, quality of sound, form or arrangement and time interval are the three materials from which a piece of music is built up, the counters which the musician has, as it were, to play with.

Now just as with the sounds, so, too, with the patterns or combinations in which they are arranged, of all possible patterns one is chosen rather than another, because it seems to be significant. As I have already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> what distinguishes the statement of the theme of a Bach Fugue from the same half a dozen notes struck at random on the piano is the order in which they are arranged and the intervals between them. The notes may be the same, but the chosen arrangement which constitutes the Fugue theme is distinguished from the random arrangement by the *order* in which the notes occur and the *intervals* at which they occur. Order and interval together constitute form, and it is in form rather than sound that the excellence of a piece of music lies. More correctly, it is to the sounds arranged in an appropriate pattern or form that the quality of being beautiful belongs.

Is this form created?

### *That Form is Discovered not Created*

It is, I think, clear that it is not,<sup>2</sup> for it is theoretically possible that the sounds might have fallen into that form by accident, although there was no mind to arrange them in it. Thus, natural sounds do sometimes fall into significant forms without ordering on the part of a mind; for example, the sounds of a trickling brook, of the wind blowing through the reeds or through a chink or hollow in the rocks.

Music, I repeat, is characterized by the quality of beauty by virtue of the fact that it consists of sounds in a certain pattern or form of arrangement. What the composer does is to discern the peculiar significance of a particular form and then deliberately to

<sup>1</sup> See chapter ii, pp. 59, 60.

<sup>2</sup> Hence my deliberate use of the word 'discerned' on p. 176.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

choose it for the setting of the sounds that he arranges in it. His skill, or rather his genius, consists in noting what from our duller insight is hidden, namely, the significant quality of the form which his mind has discerned and picked out from the assemblage of all possible forms. When he has actually composed the music, that is to say, has both selected the form and presented the sounds in it, this quality of significance is thrown into high relief, so that through the aid of his composition we experience and enjoy the significance which he was the first to discover.

### *Analogy from Chess*

The chess player, too, arranges his pieces in combination. Combinations vary in subtlety and comprehensiveness and a superior combination wins the game. What is a combination of pieces? From the point of view of physics, it is a set of wooden or ivory objects standing in spatial relations to each other. This, however, tells us as much about the game of chess as the description of a piece of music as a series of sounds standing in relations of order and interval tells us about a piece of music. Now the pieces and their locations, as they might be described from the point of view of physics, are all that a cat actually sees on the chessboard, as sounds separated by intervals are all that a cat hears of a piece of music; for what strikes upon the senses in these two instances consists entirely of pieces and of sounds. Whatever else there may be in the game of chess is apprehended by the *mind*.

Something, then, is here presented to the mind of which physics can give no account because the 'something' is not a physical thing.

Now the fact that I see more in a complicated chess position than my cat, and that the chess master sees more than I do, does not constitute a reason for supposing that I have somehow invented or created or projected or imagined this 'more', or for deducing that the 'more' was not present in the situation before I saw it. And yet the 'more' is not a physical thing. Hence, the universe must be regarded as containing *ab initio* forms or patterns of arrangement which the positioning of the pieces in a game of chess exemplifies but does not create.



## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

Again, because I am able to grasp the point of one of Morphy's end game combinations or of the Max Lange opening, nobody would conclude that my mind was responsible for what it grasped. To draw such a conclusion would be tantamount to the supposition that my mind possessed a chess genius equivalent to that of Morphy or of Max Lange. The combinations and strategy which they first devised and which my mind subsequently grasps are 'objects' for my mind, existing prior to my mind and waiting to be apprehended by it; the pieces are the physical stimuli which draw my attention to something other than themselves, namely, the combination or forms in which they are presented. Did Morphy, then, *invent* the combinations which gave him his sensational 'mates'? Did Max Lange *invent* the opening which goes by his name? I should answer that they did not.

In the last two chapters I have tried to indicate the outlines of a theory of knowledge according to which the mind in knowing is always confronted by objects other than itself. I suggest now that this is true of the thinking which goes to the devising of a piece of chess strategy or the planning of a particular combination of pieces. The particular combination was thought of, not invented by Morphy; the moves in the opening were discerned, not created by Max Lange, thought of and discerned because they were, so to speak, already 'there', present potentially to any and every mind, but awaiting the apprehension of a mind with an insight sufficiently acute to seize upon them and bring their potentiality to actualization.

Or let us imagine a chess problem. There is one way and one only, we will suppose, in which, given that particular combination of pieces, the black king can be mated in three moves. Is it to be supposed that that particular way of mating the king was not 'apprehensible' before it was, in fact, apprehended? The answer is, I think, clearly 'no'. But it could not be apprehensible unless it existed *for* apprehension, just as a situation cannot be laughable unless it exists to arouse laughter. We must conclude, then, that the solution of the problem, that is to say, the three moves which resulted in the mating of the king, was already 'there', as it were, prior to its discovery by the mind of the solver. Or, if the problem be tried and failed at on Saturday and solved on Sunday,

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

would it be said that the solution did not exist until Sunday, and not that it existed but had not yet been discovered? If this is true of the solution where only one solution is possible, it is true also of the most *elegant* solution where two or three are possible. Elegance in chess is like economy in mathematics, an aesthetic quality; the mind is not only convinced, it is delighted by an elegant solution. Therefore, not only solutions but solutions possessing aesthetic qualities exist prior to their apprehension. The mind hits upon them; it does not invent them.

### *Return to the Case of Music*

The position is, I suggest, not different in regard to those combinations of sounds with which music delights us. In music the essence of the matter, as I have already pointed out, is formal arrangement. The sounds are, of course, important—indeed, they are indispensable—being, in fact, the raw material which is arranged; but more important is the pattern *in which* they are arranged and presented. Alter this pattern, and the aesthetic quality disappears. It is after all the same collection of bricks which first forms the structure of a Georgian house and then, when the bomb falls, lies without form or significance, a mere pile of rubble.

I am suggesting that the form of arrangement into which the sounds of a musical composition fall and which confers upon them their significance is not invented, but is first discovered and then imposed by the composer upon the sensory material of sound which is presented to listeners within the framework which he has imposed. And if it is discovered it must be, so to say, *there* awaiting discovery, just as the chess openings and the solutions to the chess problems are *there*. If I am right, there may be, nay there almost certainly are, an infinite number of unexplored sound systems and patterns still hanging in silence. Consider, for example, a Chinaman, knowing only the music of the East, or a European, knowing only that of the West; it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for either to guess at the existence of the so totally different sound systems which were familiar to the other. The reflection that there may be other sound systems still unguessed

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

at should bring comfort to those who like John Stuart Mill feel apprehensive lest music may ultimately come to an end because all the sound combinations have been exhausted.<sup>1</sup>

Now, the composer selects one pattern of sounds rather than another because, when his mind first hits upon it, he discerns it as possessing aesthetic qualities which first delighted him and subsequently delight us. His superiority over his listeners consists in his ability to see in the abstract, that is to say, unembodied in the material setting of sound the aesthetic significance of forms which only become apparent to us when the body of sound shows them forth. I add two points which I cannot here develop at length.

### *Vision as Recollection and Art as a Window to Reality*

First, many composers seem to have proceeded by the method of trial and error. Thus, Beethoven is known to have tried out first one combination of sounds and then another before he hit upon the one that satisfied him as embodying the desired pattern. This I take to imply that he must in some sense have known all the time the one that *did* satisfy him, known it, that is to say, even before he hit upon it; otherwise he would not have known in respect of those that he tried and rejected that they were not the particular combinations of which he was in search.

Secondly, I have several times used the words 'beautiful' and 'significant' and spoken of forms and patterns of arrangement as possessing aesthetic qualities. I have also said<sup>2</sup> that beauty is unique and unanalysable. Let me now add that beauty is indefinable, indefinable precisely because it belongs to an order of being other than that inhabited by the physical objects of our everyday apprehension. Beauty cannot, then, be defined in terms of conceptions appropriate to the everyday order. Yet what other terms have we wherewith to define it?

<sup>1</sup>Mill's reasons, which he gives in his Autobiography, are these: 'The octave consists only of five tones and two semi-tones, which can be put together in only a limited number of ways, of which but a small proportion are beautiful: most of these, it seemed to me, must have been already discovered, and there could be no room for a long succession of Mozarts and Webers, to strike out, as these had done, entirely new and surpassingly rich veins of musical beauty.'

<sup>2</sup>See pp. 176, 177 above.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

The order to which beauty belongs, which is the order of value, contains also goodness and truth. The reason for the significance we attach to or rather find in beauty, the source of that in it which thrills us, is, then, an order of reality other than that in which our minds normally dwell. Its origin and consequences lie elsewhere; hence the beauty of the sunset and the stars, of the dawn and the dew, means always something more than stars and sunset, dawn and dew, in the sense that it lifts the soul to a different plane of reality. It follows that art is a window through which the mind catches a glimpse of the order of value. This order, timeless and perfect, is what Plato called the real world or reality.

Now, it is obvious that the clarity and truthfulness of the vision of reality which is achieved through art depends upon the pane being clear, uncoloured and, therefore, undistorting; obvious, that is to say, that the mind will more successfully achieve the vision in proportion as both the producer and the appreciator are occupied not with themselves and their own experiences, but with that external factor which in the producer's case is value and in the appreciator's, the value embodying work whose qualities evoke the experience. This factor, whether value or the work of art, I have called 'the object'. Thus, the source of greatness in music as in the other arts is a lively awareness of 'the object' on the part of the creator and a corresponding elimination of his own personality. It is with the embodiment of 'objects' not with the expression of his personality that the great artist will be concerned. To sink himself in the work presented and so to lose the consciousness of himself is also the recipe for maximum appreciation in the spectator and listener. I conclude that the composer of music, no less than the practitioner of the other arts, apprehends 'objects' and that his activity consists in their embodiment in a physical medium.

### *The Executant*

Except for a passing reference,<sup>1</sup> I have said nothing in the foregoing about the function of the *executant* whether pianist, violinist or conductor because, if it be conceded that the excellence of great

<sup>1</sup>See p. 173.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

music does not consist in its being an expression of the composer's personality, it follows that the excellence of its performance does not consist in its being an expression of the personality of the executant. The function of the executant is, in my view, not other than that of the composer; it is that of a pane of glass through which something other can be viewed. It follows that the excellence of the executant is also that of the pane, namely, to be as transparent as possible, in order that the 'something other', the 'object', should be viewed with the minimum of distortion. Many music listeners will be familiar with the feeling of complete rightness that one obtains from the performance of the greatest executants, a feeling that I can only describe by saying that they were letting one 'right through', as it were, into the music. Thus, a concert conducted by Toscanini, a piano sonata played by Schnabel, is invested with a peculiarly compelling air of what is called 'authenticity'. I can best express this by saying that the listener is not aware of the presence of a third personality with an extraneous temperament intervening between himself and the composer. What he does feel is that the musical anatomy of the work which is being played is faithfully laid bare as in a nude study by Leonardo, where every tiniest muscle is lit up and revealed in the clear light shed by the artist. It is for this reason that any piece of music played by Toscanini or Schnabel sounds different, and different precisely because of the suggestion of penetration that it conveys. It is as if a landscape which had hitherto been known only under a clouded sky were suddenly pierced to its last folds by an exuberant sun; in short, one is brought into direct confrontation with the 'object'.

### *Application of General Principles: (iii) To Religion* *'The Object' in Religion*

A word must be said on the need for the recognition of 'the object' both as goal and source, if we are to give an adequate account of 'religious experience'. I have already referred to the explanations of the religious consciousness put forward by subjectivists and given reasons for regarding them as inadequate.<sup>1</sup> If I venture to touch

<sup>1</sup> See chapters iv, pp. 114–16, and vii, p. 155.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

upon the topic of religion here, relegating it to the *rôle* of what may appear to be only an afterthought at the end of a long chapter, it is not because I deem it to be less important than education or than art—indeed, I think it to be more so—but because I have not the qualifications which would justify me in dealing with it at length. I am, however, assured that to anyone who has enjoyed even the smallest tincture of religious experience, the suggestion that what moves him, arousing his awe, his devotion and his love is nothing but an ‘object’ which he himself has created, cannot but seem a grotesquely inadequate explanation of the facts. As well try to convince the listener who is thrilled by a Beethoven quartet that the beauty which excites and transports him is felt for the contemplation of that which has emanated from himself! In the one case as in the other the human soul is profoundly convinced that it is in the presence of ‘something other’ of, in fact, an ‘object’ with which it establishes contact. Unfortunately it is impossible to demonstrate the truth of this conviction either by the empirical method of scientific verification, or by the deductive reasoning appropriate to mathematics and logic. Many would be prepared to contend that no such demonstration is necessary—as well, they would say, try to demonstrate that the sky is blue or the grass green; though they might feel inclined to ask whether it is really plausible to explain the long history of religion, with all that there is in it of evil as well as of good, on the assumption that all the fuss, a fuss which has continued for several thousand years and which has manifested itself in some form or other ever since man became recognizably man, is a fuss about nothing; or, more precisely, is a fuss engendered by something which the individual or the social consciousness has projected. There is, however, one argument which I think has weight in this connection, as tending to throw doubt on the ability of subjectivist modes of thought to explain religion away, even if we assume that the premises upon which Subjectivism normally proceeds are valid.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

### *Argument for the Objectivity of Religion on Subjectivist Premises*

These premises are broadly those of naturalism and determinism. I am here using these words in the sense in which most scientists would accept naturalism and determinism as the working postulates of their thought. These postulates I take to be roughly as follows. There is only one form of being, namely, the being that belongs to the things that we can see and touch; there is only one order of reality, the natural, spatio-temporal order; every event which occurs on that plane obeys the laws of physics and is, therefore, subject to the law of cause and effect; it does not, that is to say, occur spontaneously and in theory a complete explanation for the occurrence of any given state of affairs can be found in the state of affairs which immediately precedes it in time. Assuming that we accept these postulates, what account are we to give of the thoughts of a mind? How, in particular, are we to explain the emergence of the needs and wishes of which, on this view, religion is a rationalization?

Man's needs and wishes are the expressions of man's nature; they are what they are because he is what he is. How then did man come to be what he is? To this question those who take the naturalist view give a quite definite answer. Man, they say, has evolved in and through interaction with his environment. This is a non-committal statement to which, I imagine, all biologists would subscribe. Materialists go further and exhibit life as a mere function of its environment, a by-product of the workings of purely natural forces; while the mind of the living organism they represent as an emanation of or an epiphenomenon upon its body. Thus, a chain of causation is established which begins in the external environment, stretches across the living body of the organism via the stimulus-response linkage, and ends in the mind of the organism via the nerves-brain-mind linkage. Events in the mind of man must, then, in the last resort be regarded as the end products of a chain of causation stretching back to events in the physical world of nature.

We must suppose that this process has continued over a very

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

long period. Throughout the whole of this period everything that has occurred in a mind or consciousness is the indirect result of something which has first occurred in the world external to the mind or consciousness. Are we not, then, entitled to look upon mind as a reflection or register of the outside world, reproducing its features and taking its shape, as the bust reproduces the features and takes the shape of the mould in which it is cast? But if it *is* a reflection, the characteristics of a mind will reproduce at least in part the characteristics of the environment in which they have evolved and which they reflect. The needs and wishes of a mind are among its characteristics. Hence its needs and wishes will not be arbitrary, but will reflect features in the external world which generate the needs and provoke the wishes. But if they generate and provoke, must they not also fulfil and satisfy, or at least be capable of satisfying?

I do not wish to suggest that this materialist account of the origin and nature of human beings and their wishes is true; I do not think that it is. I am only concerned to point out that, *if it is true*, then the needs and wishes which religion seeks to fulfil and to satisfy must point to some factor in the external world which has generated them, and which guarantees the possibility of their satisfaction, in which event religion cannot be *merely* subjective.

I do not, of course, wish to suggest that this is the only, or even the most important of the arguments for theism; it is, indeed, no part of my present purpose to argue the case for theism. The peculiar significance of the argument in the present connection is that it meets and, as it seems to me, answers Subjectivism on its own ground. If it is valid, then religion no less than art and morals must be interpreted as the response of the human mind to something other than and external to itself. Thus the religious consciousness is the expression of man's awareness of an 'object', an 'object' which—such seems to be the almost universal testimony of those who have enjoyed religious experience—is a Person.

If this be so, we are from the epistemological point of view confronted with a complication of a peculiar kind.



## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

### *Transcendence and Immanence*

The Christian religion insists that God is both transcendent and immanent. The statement that God is transcendent means presumably that He is apart and independent, an 'object' to be known and worshipped, but an 'object' of such a kind that, if the whole temporal world were abolished, He would be unaffected by its disappearance. And yet even in His aspect of transcendence, He might conceivably be affected in respect of the diminution in the number of the 'objects' of his love.

When we say that God is immanent, we mean not only that God intervenes from time to time in the processes of the temporal order by a series of mighty acts but also—and herein, I take it, lies in part the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity—that He is present and can be active in our own hearts, so that the very initiative wherewith we are impelled to seek Him, to know Him and to love Him is an expression of the promptings of the Divine spirit which is present within us. We are bidden to pray that the degree of that presence may be increased, confessing that 'through the weakness of our mortal natures we can do no good thing without' God, and begging Him accordingly to 'grant us the help' of His grace. 'Breathe into our hearts', we pray, 'the inspiration of thy holy spirit' in order that, so inspired, we may be enabled to live better lives.

I have not the qualifications to enter into a further discussion of these difficult matters. I mention them here, only in so far as is necessary to establish their relevance to the general theory of knowledge which I have been attempting to expound; this relevance is, I think, three-fold.

### *That Some Values are Transcendent, Some Immanent*

(i) I suggest that the values of truth and beauty are, and must for us remain, pure 'object'. As 'objects' we apprehend and respond to them; to truth in science and mathematics, to beauty in art and music and nature. These values are wholly transcendent; they are in no sense part of the experience with which we apprehend them. How, indeed, could they be, since we are alive and our

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

experience is changing while the values are neither alive nor changing? Now it would seem to be self-evident that the non-living cannot form part of the living, the timeless of what is in time. A man who prefers ugliness to beauty is not himself ugly, nor is he who embraces error himself an embodiment of untruth. Again if a man deliberately lies or wittingly deceives others, his offence is not so much against truth as against morals. Thus, beauty and truth and their contraries are not immanent in the minds that apprehend them. We may put this by saying that the medium of the manifestation of these values in the everyday world is to be found in the laws of physics and mathematics in the one case and in nature, in wood and stone and paint and sound and, it may be, in words in the other.

(ii) The value, goodness, is also for us an 'object'. The good man serves an ideal and seeks to do his duty and to pursue what is good, because he recognizes a moral obligation to which he is subject and acknowledges moral values which owe nothing of their worth to himself. But though a man need not be beautiful to appreciate beauty and although it is meaningless to say that he who knows and cares for truth is himself true, he cannot care for and pursue what is good unless he himself, in some degree, partakes of goodness. For goodness is not only present to us as 'object'; it is also present in us as subjects, in the sense that it is only in so far as a man is already good, that he will recognize the value goodness and desire to increase in respect of the degree of goodness which he already possesses. This is because one at least of the media of the manifestation of goodness is the character of and the relationships between human persons. Archbishop Temple puts this by saying: 'truth, beauty and goodness are all absolute values; they are good in themselves, apart from all consequences. . . . But in principle goodness has a priority over the other two because it is the distinctively human type of value and we are human.' I do not myself think that any value is human and to this extent should venture to disagree, at any rate so far as the *form* of Archbishop Temple's statement is concerned. The most, I think, we are entitled to say is that one value, namely, that of goodness, manifests itself in part through the medium of the human personality and its relations with other personalities.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

(iii) The value of Deity, or, as I should prefer to say, the Spirit of God, of which the other values are, as I believe, aspects or manifestations, also expresses itself in part through the medium of humanity; God, in fact, is present in the hearts of men. What is more—and herein, I take it, is the distinctively Christian contribution to the solution of the problem of value—it is only in so far as He is so present, that we are enabled to pursue the value of goodness or, less formally, to live good lives. This conclusion follows directly from the acceptance of the doctrine of the Fall.

According to this doctrine, we are because of the Fall 'miserable sinners' in whom there is no 'health'; more precisely, it is because of our fallen state that we are helpless against the temptation of evil, *unless God grants us His grace to resist it*. We cannot, then, be good by ourselves, nor by ourselves can we become better. It is only in so far as we desire and deserve the assistance of God's grace which, indeed, if we ask for it, will not be withheld, that we can grow in respect of virtue. It is true that we desire to become better<sup>1</sup> only in so far as we are good already, just as we are told that we cannot seek Christ unless we have already found Him; but it is also true that this desire cannot be made effective by our own unassisted efforts.

Such I take to be the bearing of Christian doctrine upon the theory of value in the form in which I have here tried to set it forth. It may well be that I have mistaken this bearing for, as I say, I have no competence in such matters. But few Christians would, I imagine, demur to the general implication of what I have said, namely, that the source of value lies not within but outside ourselves.

### *Summary and Recapitulation*

This, indeed, is the general conclusion to which the various lines of thought I have followed in the foregoing discussion are all designed to point. Value, I am suggesting, lies not in the human but in the non-human. What is human achieves value only in so far as it cognizes and makes contact with the non-human; the self becomes valuable only in so far as it is crossed with the not-self.

<sup>1</sup> See (ii) above, p. 189.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

This, I have suggested, is true in art. It is what the human spirit recognizes and responds to that is valuable. Art is the expression of what the spirit recognizes, but the value consists in what is expressed, not in the expression of it. Art which takes the self for its object and becomes the vehicle for the expression of the moods and states of the self is sterile and impoverished. To be fertile the artist must be fertilized with the non-human, and his work will have value just in so far as it gives back, transmuted in the crucible of the artist's own personality, the 'object' which has fertilized him. It is true also in science. What distinguishes astrology and alchemy on the one hand from astronomy and chemistry on the other? The distinction, I suggest, is that while the two former are expressions of nothing but the speculative imaginings of the human mind unfertilized by reality, in the case of the two latter the human mind has learnt to adopt a modest attitude to objective fact, not presuming to prescribe to it what it should be or seeking to impose upon it the laws of its nature, but opening itself to the impact of the given fact, receiving it and recording what it has received. Thus, scientific knowledge is in a strict sense revelatory; it reveals the workings of the physical world which is the subject matter of the scientist's field of enquiry. Sometimes this revelation takes the form of a gradual accumulation of knowledge and information; sometimes it is vouchsafed all at once, when the so carefully accumulated items of isolated fact are suddenly seen to fall into place, as individual sounds are suddenly heard as falling within a pattern by the mind of the listener who, baffled by the first hearing of a difficult piece, 'gets', as he says, 'the hang' or 'sees the way' of it at the second or the third. The point has been well put by Sir Lawrence Bragg.

'I can well remember,' he writes, 'my own experience as a young man at Cambridge. I had been puzzling for a long time over some very exciting new effects which a German scientist had discovered, and I had an instinctive feeling that their explanation was not so complex as the one he gave. But at the time I was not, as far as I remember, thinking of anything in particular, when quite suddenly everything fell into place in my mind just as if I had been told. I remember so vividly that I could point out the

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

exact spot on the Cambridge Backs behind St. John's College where I was walking at the time.

'When a research worker after much toil begins to find the pieces of a puzzle falling into place, he has the reward of feeling that it is a *revelation*.<sup>1</sup> I do not think that "revelation" is too strong a word, because the true relation when it is apprehended is so blinding in its simplicity that it seems to be approved by, in Milton's words, "the perfect witness of all-judging Jove", something quite independent of human prejudice and frailty.'

The salient points in this interesting piece of biography are: (1) something is revealed; (2) this something is a form of arrangement as exemplified by a jig-saw puzzle or, as I have suggested, by a musical theme; (3) this form is given and discerned, not created, and is, therefore, independent of us; (4) the perception of it comes to us with a sense of complete rightness.

Science, I conclude, is fruitful precisely to the extent to which it is revelatory. When, that is to say, the human mind was content to explore and so permitted itself to be fertilized by the given 'object' instead of endeavouring, as it had hitherto done, to impose itself upon the 'object' with the natural consequence that in the shape of the laws it had prescribed, the patterns it had imposed, the wishes it had rationalized, it itself was the object of its own study, then and not until then alchemy became chemistry, astrology became astronomy and science proper was born.

It is true in morals. A life spent in the cultivation and contemplation of the self is not only a selfish, it is a boring, life. For the soul, unenriched by fruitful contact with the not-self, becomes impoverished and loses interest even as an object of contemplation. Few selves are so little repaying as objects of contemplation as those which are, in fact, abundantly contemplated. Thus, a life devoted to the pursuit of exquisite sensations and to the cultivation of agreeable states of mind is apt to be a life lacking in zest. It is no accident that the particular devil who lies in wait for those who have nothing to do but to cultivate and entertain themselves is the devil of *accidie*. Boredom is, I fear, an inadequate description of the results of his ministrations.

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

### *Conclusion in Regard to Decadence*

Herein, I have suggested, so far at least as the individual is concerned, the core of what we mean by decadence is to be found. For what answer can we make to those who propound as the only reasonable philosophy of life, 'Let us eat and drink and increase in respect of our capacity for ever more exquisite eating and drinking?', unless we admit a purpose in things, a moral law which stands outside ourselves, and values which are independent of our apprehension of them? If there is a purpose we ought to try to fulfil it; if a moral law, to obey it; if value, to pursue it. In the interests of such fulfilment, obedience and pursuit, we are justified in taking—nay, we are required to take—a selective attitude to life, seeking some experiences and eschewing others; indulging some desires and repelling others, and in general assessing our activities by reference to the degree of their worth, as measured by an external standard. In a word, we are required to train and to discipline ourselves. But there can be no measurement without a yard stick which is other than the stuff it measures; no ground for discipline unless there is an end for the sake of which discipline is enforced. Thus, I can go without my half bottle of port after dinner because I want to sit up late over my work; but why keep a clear head unless there is something to work *for*? The whole concept of the training of character and the disciplining of desire depends for its validity on the acceptance of ends, goals and purposes for the sake of which we submit to training and discipline, seeking to become one kind of person when, lacking the training, not subjected to the discipline, we should have remained another. But that we should prefer one kind of character and life to another entails the acceptance of the notion of value, since it involves the recognition of ends and ideals in the interests of which the preference is exercised. If there is no value outside the self, then there is nothing worth cultivating but the self and experience becomes an end in itself.

Hence, the recognition of what I have called the 'object', is a pre-condition of our emancipation from the valuations and habits which I have identified with decadence.

That this is true also in religion is, I think, obvious; it is obvious,

## EDUCATION, ART AND RELIGION

that is to say, if religion is itself true, for religion takes as its premise that the source of value lies outside ourselves, is, indeed, God who created us and the world. Religion, moreover, takes it for granted that perfection is to be found not in the human, nor, indeed, in any conceivable extension or development of the human, but in the non-human, that is to say in God; it insists that we ourselves are worthless without God and that it is only in so far as He assists us that we shall succeed in realizing in ourselves any part of the value whose source is outside ourselves; but it adds that God, being immanent in us, will assist us if we pray to Him for grace, and that He is the source in us of the very impulse that prompts us to seek Him.

So much for the application of the general principles set out in the last three chapters, to the interpretation of education, art and religion. I have still to consider their application in the spheres of psychology and social ethics. This will be attempted in the next two chapters. In Part II, I shall hope to illustrate them from contemporary art and literature, politics and morals. We may then be in a position to hazard a view as to how far our own society should be regarded as decadent.

## CHAPTER IX

# The 'Psychologizing' of Morals and of Thinking

Most people would agree that among the characteristics of the thought of our age were religious scepticism, the denial of free will, an absence of belief in the independent validity of moral principle and in the existence of intrinsic worth, as, for example, in the intrinsic beauty of works of art, or the intrinsic goodness of some people's characters and the conduct in which such characters are expressed. Each of the characteristics I have named illustrates in a different way what I have denominated by the general title, the 'dropping of the object'. In this chapter I wish to consider the part played by psychology in contributing to this result. First, I shall mention some of the theories and tendencies which are relevant to my theme; secondly, indicate in what respects they are, in my view, mistaken; thirdly, try to show why they both contribute to and follow from 'the dropping of the object'.

### 1. THE EROSION OF WILL, REASON AND CONSCIENCE

The predominating influence in contemporary psychology is the theory of the unconscious. According to this theory the conscious faculties of mankind are set in motion by forces lying below the threshold of consciousness whose genesis evades detection and whose workings escape control—inevitably, since to control them we must first detect and recognize them, and, if they could be detected and recognized, they would not be unconscious but conscious. Thus traditional virtues such as courage and self-sacrifice are represented as the sublimated versions of unconscious trends,



## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

courage of masochism, self-sacrifice of what is called 'the death instinct'. The animal origin of man is emphasized and stress is laid on the instincts and desires which he shares with the animals. It is then suggested that these instincts and desires are still influential below the surface and largely determine the operations of the more specifically human faculties which function above the surface. Unconscious impulse and instinct are the pipers which play the tune, and reason, will and conscience adjust their steps to the measures which presumably they, but not we, hear. Or, to adopt another metaphor, reason, will and conscience are corks bobbing about on the waves of the unconscious, their movements being determined by the currents which run below the surface. For it is in its application to the three faculties which I have named that this analysis produces results which are both important in themselves and directly relevant to my thesis.

I am not, of course, suggesting that all psychologists subscribe to the views I have just indicated and am about to develop, nor even that all psycho-analysts do so. I am fully aware that many psychologists would explicitly repudiate these conclusions; indeed, Professor Flügel, one of the best-known exponents of Freudian views in this country, tells us in his book, *A Hundred Years of Psychology*, that there is a fairly general agreement among both theoretical and experimental psychologists today as to the nature of will and proceeds to describe the view in regard to which he believes the agreement to exist.

### *The Hormic Psychology*

It is the view of the will as a dynamic impulsion which receives perhaps its most distinctive exposition at the hands of the 'hormic' psychologists. The psyche, on this view, is essentially dynamic; behaviour is, no doubt, in the first instance a response to a stimulus, but it is always an active response, is, that is to say, a response which goes beyond the merely reflex actions of a mechanical body, or the merely passive sensations of an epiphenomenal mind.

The dynamism of the mind is particularized as an inborn psychophysical disposition to behave in certain typical ways. Now, all

## AND OF THINKING

the so-called faculties of the older psychologies, cognition and feeling, conation and purpose, above all, will, are merely ways in which the fundamental springs of our being find their outlets. Will, in fact, is not determined by some force operating below the threshold of consciousness which is other than itself; it is itself the expression of that force in action, and the force is conative and free.

Again, the account which McDougall gives of the 'self-regarding' sentiment—he identifies it with self-respect and finds its most distinctive expression in such remarks as 'I could have died of shame'—is strongly reminiscent of Plato's description of the 'spirited element' which is the second part of the soul. Now, Plato's 'spirited element' is free and conative, ready and eager to lend the dynamic strength of its enthusiasms to the first part of the soul in the unremitting war which reason wages against the appetites and the desires.

As for reason herself, her gradual emancipation from desire is acclaimed by Professor Flügel as one of the signs of man's progress. Thus, in *Man, Morals and Society*, he particularizes as an element in man's advance his progress 'from orectic (moral) judgement to cognitive (psychological) judgement', which latter he regards as a 'natural consequence of the development of knowledge and the scientific attitude'. Knowledge and the scientific attitude, then, entail the possibility of advance from judgement determined by the emotions and desires to judgement determined only by the evidence upon which judgement is based.

All this, no doubt, is true; nevertheless, the question may be asked, (1) whether the official attitudes of psychologists are in general always consistent with the views which they express when they are, so to speak, off guard; and (2) whether this particular attitude can be maintained consistently with the fundamental premises of the hormic and psycho-analytical schools whose influence is dominant in contemporary psychology.

If the fundamental forces of our nature are instinctive, impulsive or conative, then it is difficult to see how it can be possible *not* to relegate our more recently acquired and distinctively human faculties reason, will and conscience to the status of by-products, sublimations or expressions of their non-rational psychic foundation. In short, if what is fundamental is impulsive and conative,

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

then reason and will, since they are not impulsive and conative, must be phenomenal. These conclusions are reinforced if the fundamental elements in our nature are regarded as being unconscious.

Now, these are precisely the presuppositions from which in their unguarded moments most—I am far from suggesting all—psychologists proceed; these are the attitudes to reason and will and conscience which in actual practice they frequently adopt; these, too, are the attitudes which logically spring from the presuppositions.

### *The Psychologizing of Reason*

Let me illustrate these generalizations by reference to special faculties.

First, in regard to reason: the rational faculty is relegated to the position of handmaid to impulse and instinct. Impulse and instinct, whether conceived as conscious or unconscious—though usually in contemporary thought as unconscious—set the ends of action and prescribe the objects of belief. Reason is set the task of planning the means for securing the ends and inventing *reasons* for holding the beliefs to which we are instinctively prompted.

Not only can reason not begin to operate unless these irrational forces bring her into play; every step in her deliberations is, on this view, guided by their influence, nor can she arrive at any conclusion which is in opposition to their trends or contrary to their promptings. This is no less true of what would commonly be called abstract theoretical reasoning than of concrete practical reasoning; no less true of the establishment of a formula in mathematics or the solution of a problem in chess than of the planning of an ambush to trap an enemy or of a strategy to seduce a girl. Thus, Professor McDougall tells us, 'the instincts are the prime movers of all human activity . . . all the complex intellectual apparatus of the most highly developed mind is but the instrument by which these impulses seek their satisfaction'.

The quotation from McDougall has been deliberately selected in order to bring out the point that this doctrine is not maintained only by professional psycho-analysts, nor is it necessary to hold

## AND OF THINKING

some one particular theory of the unconscious or, indeed, any theory of the unconscious at all—McDougall, for example, did not officially adopt the psycho-analytical doctrine of the unconscious self—to subscribe to this conclusion in regard to the status of reason.

Freud, Adler, Jung and their followers all tend explicitly or implicitly to adopt a similar conclusion. It is also logically implied by the 'hormic' psychology, which represents the personality as at once the vehicle and the product of a series of instinctive impulses and drives, and reinforced by dominant trends in anthropology and sociology.

The literature of the period between the two wars, more particularly that of such writers as D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, is pervaded by this attitude, which has, I think, come to represent what may be called the prevalent view among educated people in England and America who are not professional philosophers. As 'popularly maintained, it issues in the conclusion that we think what we do not because we are constrained by the evidence or persuaded by the arguments but because, given the particular situation in which we find ourselves, the hidden forces of our nature constrain us to react in a particular way and constrain our reasoning to reach those conclusions which are appropriate to our instinctive reaction. Reason, then, is determined not by the 'object' but by non-rational forces within ourselves.

The words 'determined' and 'object' are designedly introduced here to indicate, (1) that the implications of this attitude to reason are in fact determinist, and (2) that it constitutes another instance of the 'dropping of the object'.

### *The 'Psychologizing' of Will*

Still proceeding on the basis of the unstated premises rather than of the official pronouncements of psychologists, we may note that, granted the fundamentally 'hormic' nature of the psyche, no specific function is or consistently can be claimed for the will. For the word 'will', it is clear, has little or no meaning unless the will is taken to be free. More precisely, the will is reduced to the status of psychological resultant of a conflict of

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

forces which is usually conceived as taking place below the threshold of consciousness. Usually, but not necessarily; for, given a view of human nature as fundamentally animal or, more precisely, as motivated by desires and impulses not fundamentally different from those which motivate the animals with conscience, reason and will as recent and rather precarious additions which have somehow been tacked on to our more fundamental natures, then it is possible to describe the workings of the human psyche on determinist lines without travelling beyond the bounds of consciousness. We can say, for example, that there are present in consciousness a number of conflicting desires. To simplify, let us reduce them to two, called respectively the desire for A and the desire for B. The desire for B contrives to secure for itself the backing of the so-called moral elements in our nature, elements which are, of course, explained on ordinary subjectivist lines, and, so reinforced, is enabled to show that it is a desire which *ought* to be indulged while A is a desire which ought not. Alternatively, B contrives to represent the object which it desires as ethically admirable, while the object appropriate to desire A is stigmatized as ethically disreputable. Proceeding on these lines, desire B is enabled to masquerade as a *will* for the good of the whole, or as a determination to do one's duty, or as a striving after 'right' or, more simply, as a desire for 'good'.

Another method of describing the situation is to take a single desire, desire A, and postulate a part of our natures which struggles against A, as when I desire to read a book of tortures and part of me struggles against it on the ground that I shall be sickened. (Part of me may, of course, object on the ground that to enjoy reading about torture is shameful; this falls within the category of 'moral reinforcements' just considered. I am concerned here only with instinctive repugnances which may exist as well as and in opposition to instinctive desires.) The part of me that struggles presents itself in the guise of a *will* to suppress the temptation to give away to desire A; it is, however, at bottom only another desire, desire B.

The effect of the analysis in all these cases is to reduce the situation to the simplest terms, those, namely, of a conflict of pulls and desires. In this conflict either the strongest wins or there

## AND OF THINKING

emerges a mechanical resultant of all the different conflicting pulls, A, B, C and D, which takes the form of desire E. The relevant point is that all the elements in the conflict are represented as being essentially *of the same kind*. When we call one of these elements 'the will' what, in effect, we are doing is to make use of reason to dignify the desire which does in the end gain the day with an ethically honorific label, in order that we may give ourselves moral marks for indulging it, as when a tyrant 'wills' to suppress a revolt, when what he in fact wants to do is to inflict punishment and pain upon human beings, or to put away a minister for reasons of state, when in fact he has grown tired of the minister.

This scheme is also deterministic since a will so conceived has no better title to freedom than has that of reason. The analysis describes the moral situation purely in terms of contrary pulls, drives and impulses which constitute what may be called the raw materials of our nature, and the sublimations of the pulls, drives and impulses, which we call sometimes reason and sometimes will. In short, it makes no provision for 'the object'. It does not admit that we may desire X because X is intrinsically desirable and is recognized by the mind to be so; what it does say is that we have an instinctive drive which impels us towards or gives us a fixation upon X, because that happens to be the way in which we are made.

### *The 'Psychologizing' of Conscience*

Conscience fares no better. Conscience is not the arbiter of right and wrong, equipped, as Bishop Butler maintained, with the conative force to pursue the right which it has recognized. Still less is it the voice of the universal Creator speaking through the consciousness of the creature. It is the sublimation of a feeling of guilt inherited from our remote ancestors. They forbade and proscribed certain kinds of conduct for utilitarian reasons;<sup>1</sup> we have inherited a feeling of instinctive guilt in regard to conduct of the kinds in question and because we have forgotten the reasons which

<sup>1</sup> See for a more detailed treatment the account given of subjective judgments in chapter iv, pp. 111-16, and of the origin of the moral consciousness in chapter vii, pp. 154, 155.

## ‘PSYCHOLOGIZING’ OF MORALS

originally led society to deter its members from acting in these ways, this feeling of guilt seems to us mysterious. That which arouses the feeling is, we say, wrong in itself, although we can’t say why it is wrong. In later Freudian writing conscience is exhibited as an aspect of the super-ego which is identified with or derived from (both phrases are used) parental authority. Whichever of these views we take, conscience is robbed both of spontaneity and authority and is relegated to the position of a mechanical cash register. The unconscious machinery gets to work and, as a result, the warning bell of conscience is rung, the red flag raised.

The position which I have just summarized I now propose to criticize.

## 2. THAT THE PERSONALITY FUNCTIONS ALWAYS AS A WHOLE

It is fashionable to criticize the faculty psychology, that is to say, the view which represents human beings as having or as being made up of a set or bundle of different faculties. Officially this psychology is abandoned. And, indeed, it became so infinitely complex with its numberless distinctions between sensation and perception—the brain was passive in sensation ; it merely registered impressions on the retina ; a second brain was, therefore, required to invest the bare sensation with meaning and to transform it into a perception—between disposition, emotion and sentiment, between instinct, impulse and desire, between idea, content and meaning, as to have become to all intents and purposes unworkable. Nevertheless, the propensity to think in terms of faculties still persists ; it is, indeed, extremely difficult to eradicate and is responsible for the type of analysis of which I have just given illustrations.

### *The Reductive Tendency and the Fallacy which it Embodies*

The propensity is a particular example of a widespread tendency which might be called the ‘reductive tendency’, which reduces

## AND OF THINKING

wholes to parts, atomizes objects and then seeks to give an account of them in terms of the parts and atoms to which it has reduced them. This tendency is already in part repudiated in the physical sciences. We have long known that an element does not behave as if it were merely the sum total of the separate atoms of which it is composed, a molecule as if it were the sum total of its separate elements, a chemical compound as if it were the sum total of its separate molecules, or a living organism as if it were the sum total of the chemical compounds into which the body of the organism can be analysed. In other words, modern science makes use of the concept of levels and recognizes that at each level new qualities emerge which are characteristic of that level and are not to be found among the components at the previous level.

It follows that to reduce the mind to a bundle of faculties, to give a separate account of each faculty, to put the accounts together, and then triumphantly to exhibit the result as an account of the mind as a whole is to make a double mistake.

First, it is to presuppose that the mind can be so disintegrated and remain a mind; this is analogous to supposing that you can divide a flower into petals, pistil and stamen and that it will remain a flower, or a symphony into its component notes and that it will remain a symphony. It is to suppose, in other words, that a mind, a flower or a symphony is simply the arithmetical sum total of the component parts into which it can be analysed and that nothing is therefore lost in the analysis. I am reminded of Collingwood's pointed comment in his book, *An Autobiography*, on the treatment of the mind in William James's, *Principles of Psychology*, 'The mind, regarded in this way, ceases to be a mind at all.'

It would take me too far afield to embark upon a full criticism of this mistake. Its essence is to omit the element of form. I am using the word 'form' here in the Aristotelian sense. According to Aristotle, everything consists of a combination of two elements, matter and form, the form being the matter in the highest condition to which it can be brought; or, alternatively, at the latest or most mature point of development which it is capable of reaching. Thus, while marble is form to stone, marble in human shape



## ‘PSYCHOLOGIZING’ OF MORALS

form to marble, marble in feminine shape form to marble in human shape, the likeness of Venus, which is the final form which the marble is capable of receiving, and which is form, therefore, in relation to marble in feminine shape, may be regarded as *the form* of the marble. To state the same position in another way, the form is that condition which the matter is trying to achieve and which determines the development of the matter towards it. Before it is realized, it exists in potentiality, a potentiality which may never become actual.

The doctrine of matter and form entails as one of its corollaries that when a number of elements or factors of a certain kind come together or are brought together they constitute an entity at a new level. The new level entity not only contains the elements taken from the lower level, but transforms them so that it is only in the setting which the elements receive at the higher level that their full potentialities become apparent. Form, in other words, not only transforms matter; it is a necessary condition of the matter being enabled to realize all that it has in it to be. Thus form, as I sought to show on an earlier page when discussing the structural analysis of music,<sup>1</sup> is the distinguishing essence of things. To overlook this truth, and, in consequence, to lose sight of the distinguishing essence of mind, is the first of the mistakes which are involved in the reduction of mind to a bundle of faculties or of a personality to a collection of characteristics. This point is admirably brought out in the criticisms which the Gestalt psychologists have brought against the traditional faculty psychologies.

### *The Omission of the Factor of Form*

The second mistake is the same mistake looked at from the other side. It is to suppose that the characteristics of the elements taken by themselves are sufficient to account for the characteristics of the whole. This is to commit the fallacy of ‘the reductive tendency’ in its simplest form. It is equivalent to saying that the qualities of the eggs and the milk *are* the qualities of the omelette, that the qualities of the vibrations in the atmosphere *are* the

<sup>1</sup> See chapter viii, pp. 177–82.

## AND OF THINKING

qualities of the symphony, that the qualities of the carbon compounds *are* the qualities of the living organism, that the qualities of silver and of chlorine *are* the qualities of silver chloride. I end with the illustration from chemistry since the fact that this *is* a fallacy is in the case of the more advanced sciences sufficiently well established. No chemist would make the mistake of supposing that the qualities of the chemical compound are the same as those of the component atoms to which its elements can in theory be reduced or even of the chemical elements of the compound. He is accustomed to the notion that new qualities 'emerge' in compounds which are not to be found in the elements of the compound. Even the layman knows that water, which is  $H_2O$ , is wet, although no property of wetness attaches to hydrogen or to oxygen.

Looked at from the point of view of the whole, we may say that the reduction of the whole into its elements leaves out the factor of form. Looked at from the point of view of the elements, we may say that the assumption that the aggregation of elements is identical with the whole leaves out the factor of emergence.

### *The Philosopher's Familiarity with Form*

All this, of course, is familiar to the philosopher, Aristotle's theory of form and matter being part of his stock in trade as a teacher. Again, he is versed in theories of substance which, whatever view he may take on this vexed problem, will at least have brought home to him the difficulty of establishing any intelligible conception of the so-called substance or stuff of which things are commonly supposed to be made. Finally, he has in the course of his training been introduced to the idealist doctrine of internal relations, which informs him that the being of a thing consists of and is constituted by its relations with other things—indeed, there is no aspect of the outmoded idealist philosophy of the nineteenth century which has worn better than this particular doctrine.

Now, whatever view the philosopher may take in regard to these time-honoured philosophical doctrines, the notion of form as constituting the nature or being of a thing, with the resultant corollary that it is not only what, to put it crudely, the thing is

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

made of, but also the relations which hold between its parts, as well as the relations into which it enters with other things and the way in which it behaves in those relations, which make it what it is—this notion, I say, cannot but be familiar to him.

But for the scientist this mode of thinking is difficult and to many scientists it is profoundly repugnant.

It is not hard to see why this should be the case. When I say that the intellectual climate of our time has been formed for us by science, it is not the unconfident science of today with its overtures to philosophy, its hostages to mysticism and its flirtations with religion, that I have in mind, but the positive materialist science of the nineteenth century which still dominates common modes of thought, even when its concepts have been dropped by the parent sciences which gave them birth. Now form is not a material thing, and it is, therefore, difficult for materialist science to countenance its existence. An emergent characteristic flouts the law of cause and effect; it is a something present in the effect which was not present in the cause and so is anathema to determinism. But even in their heyday materialism and determinism failed notably to give an even plausible account of mind, so that the difficulties which they have now encountered in their appointed sphere of matter need occasion no surprise.

### *The Concept of Levels*

For, since the beginning of the century, science itself has been increasingly driven to repudiate precisely those concepts which chiefly stand in the way of the recognition of the factor of form. The story of this abandonment is an old one and I need not retell it here. It is, however, common knowledge that in physics, in biology and in psychology, the notion that the universe is, so to speak, all of a piece, with the corollary that the same modes of explanation are applicable throughout, has increasingly proved untenable and has been replaced by the concept of a hierarchy of levels both of explanation and of reality. We no longer seek explanations of all phenomena in terms of the concept of a single mode of existing, acknowledging uniform causal laws and amenable to a uniform method of interpretation.

## AND OF THINKING

In physics, for example, we find that the laws of the macroscopic world do not hold in the sub-atomic world any more than they hold in the cosmogony of space-time curvature.

In biology the laws governing organic development vary with the particular stage of growth which embryonic tissue has reached and the part of the organism's body upon which it has been grafted. Tissue, in other words, organizes itself and develops differently, displaying different characteristics and modes of behaviour, according to the environment in which it is placed. Thus, whether a growing tissue which is cut off from one part, say a tail, and grafted on to another part, we will suppose a leg, of the organism's body will turn into tail or leg depends upon the stage of its own development at which it is cut off. If it is grafted at a sufficiently early stage of its development, the new environment will prevail and it will be leg. If it is grafted at a later stage, then inherent natural trends will prevail and it will be tail.

In psychology the Gestalt school may be said to have successfully established the fact that a perceptual element in a total sense field is what it is because of its relation to other elements in the same field. Destroy or alter that relation and the element is apprehended as a different element.

### *That Form is an Integral Factor of Reality*

All these examples—and I am here only touching upon the salient points in a vast field of recent scientific work—seem to point in the same direction. The reality of a thing consists no less in its form than in its substance. By form is meant the way in which it is arranged with other things of the same kind to make a whole plus the way in which it behaves in association with these other things to produce the behaviour proper to the whole. But the relation between thing and the whole of which, together with other things of the same kind, the thing forms a part, is a two-way relation in the sense that while the thing *as part* contributes in combination with other things of the same kind to produce the specific and distinguishing characteristics of the whole, which, indeed, is only brought into being by the association of its parts, so the whole in its turn reciprocally affects the thing which is its

## ‘PSYCHOLOGIZING’ OF MORALS

part. By this I mean that the form of the whole determines the being and behaviour of the components which themselves receive complete actuality only as components of the whole. A thing's reality, in other words, is to be found not so much in what at any given moment it is, as in what it will in association with other things become; as Aristotle puts it, the form of a thing is ‘that which the matter was all along’.

These are general principles. My immediate interest lies in their bearing upon the question of personality. This would seem to be as follows: if the personality cannot be satisfactorily analysed into the collection of its parts or elements, there is a sense in which the whole personality is present in everything that we do.

### *In What Sense the Whole Personality is always Present*

I emphasize the words ‘there is a sense’ for clearly it is not always present to an equal, or in an equally obvious, degree. When we are climbing a mountain, we may be tempted to sit down and rest; we may also and at the same time be impelled to continue until we get to the top. We may think it would be agreeable to turn round and enjoy the view; we may also and at the same time think it would be even more agreeable to wait until we get to the top and then enjoy it when it is suddenly and completely revealed. When we *do* get to the top, we rest without compunction and also enjoy wholly and completely.

Now, it would be wrong to suggest that the personality is as wholly present at the moment of indecision during the ascent or in taking the action, whatever it may be, which follows upon the indecision, as it is when, having reached the top, we enjoy the view undisturbed by the solicitations of desire or the temptation to rest. Similarly, it would be wrong to suggest when we are struggling against, yet failing to resist temptation, doing the evil that we would not and leaving undone the good that we would, that our personality is as wholly and unitedly engaged as it is during the whole-hearted and undisturbed enjoyment of a work of art. Indeed, it has been pertinently pointed out, for example, by Schopenhauer, that one of the reasons for the tranquillity and serenity of our contemplation and enjoyment of great art is to be

## AND OF THINKING

found in the fact that the many clamorous voices of our many and divided natures are, for so long as the contemplation lasts, stilled.

I am not unaware of the difficulty presented by the case of contending desires. I am contending only that in cases of conflict whichever way the decision may go, it is our whole personality, albeit impaired and acting with diminished force, that acts upon the decision. It is not the case, when reason approves A, but desire insists on B, that, when we do B, reason has been left behind; it is caught up and carried forward and made use of by desire. Similarly, it is not the case when we do A that our action is an expression of reason acting by itself in contradistinction to desire. What enables us to do A is the energy of a desire of which reason approves and which it has harnessed to its ends. So much, I think, follows from the refusal to atomize the personality into reason and desire, and then to try to account for the facts of experience on the assumption that, because they are distinguishable in thought, reason and desire are in fact separate and separately existing constituents of our total make-up.

### *Plato and Aristotle on Reason and Desire*

The right view of this matter is, I think, to be found in the doctrine of Plato and Aristotle. Plato divided the soul into three 'parts', the reasoning, the 'spirited'—the word stands for the higher and nobler emotions, indignation at wrong, shame at doing what is base, compassion—and the desiring or appetitive. I put the word 'parts' into inverted commas to indicate that the word in its English connotation is misleading. The word 'aspects' would more nearly express Plato's meaning. For, on Plato's view, each so-called 'part' of the soul is, in fact, present in all the soul's activities. When a man acts on the promptings of reason it does not follow that desire is absent; for thought, Plato would agree with Aristotle, cannot by itself issue in action. What the man who acts from reason 'desires' is the good of the whole or, more precisely, those ends which are compatible with the good of the whole or which like beauty and truth are intrinsically good. Similarly, when a man acts according to desire, it does not follow that reason is wholly silent; reason is active either as approving

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

the ends of desire or as planning the means which are necessary to desire's accomplishment. Again, when reason suppresses desire, it calls upon the spirited element of the soul to help it to impose its discipline. It is only with the aid of the nobler emotions that reason suppresses ignoble cravings.

Putting this in modern psychological terms, we may say that the personality has a 'conative' aspect and that this aspect of 'conation' is a feature of each of Plato's three 'parts' of the soul. It is present as an impelling force in all the soul's activities, even the most abstract train of thought being sustained by the conation to reach its conclusion. But it does not, therefore, follow that the ends of thought are *set* by conation. As Plato himself puts it in the *Republic*, for each 'part' there is a corresponding 'life' with characteristic 'desires' of its own.

What, then, distinguishes one form of activity from another? The answer, implied though not fully worked out by Plato, is the 'object' upon which it is directed. Plato, indeed, explicitly develops this view in so far as the cognitive faculties are concerned. To every faculty of thinking, he maintained, there is its appropriate 'object', to knowledge, reality, to belief, semi-reality, by which he meant the spatio-temporal order with which we make contact in sensory experience and which we explore in science, to ignorance, the sphere of not-being. Since knowledge and belief are each 'set over' their approximate 'objects', it follows that the thing that we know is never the same as the thing we believe.

To examine this distinction further would take us more deeply into the region of metaphysics than I here wish to go. Nor, indeed, in the view of many philosophers, can Plato's distinction between the cognitive faculties be satisfactorily maintained in the form in which he advanced it. I mention it here because, granted that the method of distinguishing human activities and experiences by the postulation of special faculties has been rejected, the effect of the rejection is to throw into high relief the alternative method of distinguishing them by reference to their 'objects'. This indeed is the logical outcome of Plato's theory of the so-called 'parts' of the soul. If these are not so much 'parts' as 'aspects'; if, that is to say, when we are engaged in desiring, reason and spirit do not, as it were, go out of commission or even out of

## AND OF THINKING

action, if, when we reason, desire is still operative, how are we, in fact, to differentiate between men's characters and natures except by reference to the sort of occupations which attract them, the kind of interests they pursue, the nature of the activities upon which they engage, the pattern of the lives that they live. We shall distinguish them in other words by reference to the sort of 'objects' to which they pay attention, looking to see whether these are the 'objects' appropriate to reason, to 'spirit' or to desire. Such, at least, is Plato's theory, and it will be remembered that it is by reference to that 'part' of the soul which is normally in control of the rest that he divides the citizens into the three classes of the Platonic State. Thus, there are predominantly 'desiring', predominantly 'spirited' and predominantly 'reasoning' men. The predominantly 'desiring' men pursue the ends appropriate to 'desire', sensual enjoyment, wealth, ease and comfort; the predominantly 'spirited' men, the ends appropriate to 'spirit', military glory and honour, the approval of their fellow men, the sense of having saved or served their side, prestige, *esprit de corps*; the predominantly 'reasoning' men, the ends appropriate to reason, knowledge, contemplation, philosophy and also, at a lower level, government.

Aristotle takes broadly the same line. In his thought, as in Plato's, the so-called 'parts' of the soul are 'parts' only by courtesy. For Aristotle, the soul contains 'parts' very much in the sense in which a quadrilateral contains its angles; nor is there for him—any more than there is for Plato—any state of the soul in which all the different 'parts' are not present. But the soul not only contains its 'parts', it transforms them, so that just as in the life of sensation and desire we are performing the purely instinctive functions which we share with the vegetable world raised to a higher power, so in the life of thought and spirit, feeling, sense and appetite are themselves caught up and transcended. It follows that no human function, activity or characteristic is ever *purely* irrational in the sense that reason plays *no* part in its formation and pattern. There is a sense in which even our physical characteristics bear upon them the impress of reason. Thus, men are celibate for religious reasons; they shave because reason warns them that bearded young men cannot expect to get jobs; English youths exhibit a



## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

certain kind of physical structure if they belong to the public school class; another, if they have passed their youth in the slums; the wrestler deliberately causes a roll of muscle to develop on his arm. Reason shapes the so-called irrational elements in our nature in another sense. Our desires and tastes are largely determined for us by the community to which we belong; this consciously employs reason in the training and education of its members. Hence, our desires and tastes tend to fall into a pattern which adaptation to our social environment has traced. By the time middle age is reached, adaptation is usually complete and few, if any, rebellious desires occur to disturb the fit of body, mind and soul into the social system which the reason of the community has ordained.

For—and I am here still following the thought of Aristotle—the life of reason does not disdain desire. It is, indeed, by desire that our general ends and purposes are set. When we say that these are rational, we mean that they are such as are appropriate to reason or such as reason approves. Reason is not, then, opposed to desire as such; it is opposed only to those desires which would deflect us from the pursuit of the ends which the general run of desire desires and which reason approves. What reason seeks to do and in a successful life does in fact do is so to dovetail the different desires that they fit into a harmonious and approved pattern of desire. By this means the energy and strength of all the elements of our personality are harnessed to the service of one or more dominating desires which are for the good of the whole as prescribed by reason. A metaphor to which Plato has recourse in this connection is that of a charioteer driving a number of unruly horses. Each horse seeks to pull the chariot in a different direction, with the result that, lacking a charioteer, the chariot, instead of proceeding in a straight line, would zig-zag all over the course and be rendered incapable of reaching any pre-determined objective. Or one of the horses, taking the bit between its teeth, would career off the course, dragging the chariot and the other horses after it to the destruction of them all.

The charioteer, however, guides and controls the horses, allowing to each one of them only so much of its own way as is compatible with the satisfaction of the others and the pursuance

## AND OF THINKING

by the chariot of the course mapped out for it in advance. In the analogy the horses are the separate desires, the charioteer reason, the chariot plus horses and charioteer the whole man. Its purport is to show how reason can and should guide and control desire in the interests of the good of the whole. But reason so employed, employed, that is to say, in the dovetailing and restraining which is necessary for the establishment of harmony of desire, is more properly called 'will' and the dominating desire which is approved by reason, that is to say, the desire for the good of the whole, may more appropriately be denoted by the word 'purpose'.

### *The Difficulty of Language*

Indeed, throughout this section, I have been hampered by the difficulties of language. I have been concerned to repudiate the doctrine of 'parts' and faculties; yet I have found myself continually constrained to speak in terms of them, using the words 'desire', 'impulse', 'reason', and now 'will' and 'purpose', *as if* they stood for separate and separately functioning items in our total make-up.

I believe that we are never justified in asserting that it is anything less than the personality as a whole which functions; but I am constrained to add that it functions sometimes in ways that we call appetitive, sometimes in other ways that Plato called 'spirited', sometimes in others that we call 'rational', just as a cloud may assume a number of different shapes, so that we say of it that it is now like a hand, now like a hill, now like a horse, now like a stain, and yet through all its various shapes remains the same cloud.

### *Distinction of Faculty by Reference to Object*

If this be agreed, the question next arises, how are we to distinguish one mode of psychological activity from another? Broadly there are two answers. The first is by introspection. Our experience, we may say, is perceptibly different when we are thinking from what it is when we are desiring. This answer is unsatisfactory, (*a*) because introspection is notoriously a

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

misleading guide which has received particularly severe criticism during the last two decades ; (b) because the experience of desiring a beef-steak is introspectibly different from that of desiring strawberries and cream, yet we feel no disposition to postulate a different faculty in each of the two cases ; (c) because what really distinguishes the strawberry-and-cream-desiring-experience from the beef-steak-desiring-experience is the fact that they are set over against or directed upon different objects. In other words, the introspectible experience of desiring strawberries and cream is different from the introspectible experience of desiring beef-steak precisely because strawberries and cream are different from beef-steak and because we respond to them differently. Thus, our third objection is that in many cases the distinction in terms of introspectible experience plainly reduces itself to a prior distinction in terms of object.

At this point the conclusion to which our analysis has been tending begins to emerge. Directly the notion of different faculties is abandoned, the only satisfactory way of distinguishing one experience from another is by reference to the objects of the respective experiences. The only valid way of distinguishing reason from desire or, as I should prefer to put it, for distinguishing the personality as a whole, functioning under its reasoning aspect, from the personality as a whole functioning under its desiring aspect, is by pointing to the fact that the two types of functioning are responses by the personality to two different kinds of object. Some objects of reason are, to use common parlance, theoretical and abstract, for example, the truths of science and philosophy ; some, again in common parlance, are practical, for example, how to find an object that has been mislaid, or how to go by the shortest route from A to B. The objects of desire are both concrete, as, for example, food, drink and warmth, and also in part, abstract, as for example, respectability, power and place.

To all these different kinds of object we respond differently and to the different experiences involved in so responding we affix labels. These are the labels of the so-called different faculties ; one is named desire, another impulse, another emotion, another reason. The whole self is, nevertheless, present in each response,

## AND OF THINKING

though it wears a different shape and colour in each situation, as a chameleon takes the colours of the environment to which he reacts.

### *Interpretation of the Case of Conflict in terms of the Foregoing Analysis*

The explanation of the case in which conflict occurs, as it does, for example, between what is called reason and what is called desire, is, I would suggest, that there are simultaneously present to the self different objects provoking it to different and contradictory responses. By the word 'present' I do not wish to be taken to mean spatially or even temporally present, for, granted that the mind is capable of being aware of and responding to objects which do not exist in space or which, though once present in time, exist now in a different region of time from that occupied by the apprehending mind, we must be credited with the ability to respond to the pull of an ideal—to free slaves or to conquer dipsomania—or to pursue a purpose—to seek to become Prime Minister or to pass an examination—just as we can respond when thirsty to a glass of water or, when we love, to the presence of the loved person. The experiences known as 'struggling', 'resolving' and 'determining' are evoked by the presence of difficulties and obstacles to the realization of the ideal or the fulfilment of the purpose. These may be external or they may be occasioned by conflicts within ourselves. Thus, the responses that we make to a glass of water when thirsty or to the loved person come under the category of what is normally called 'desire'. We may be unable to obtain the glass of water because it is beyond our reach, having been put there by somebody who wishes to torture us, or we may deliberately abstain from it because of the supposedly greater need of another. Similarly, we may be unable to satisfy our desires in regard to the loved person because she will have none of us, or because we deliberately refrain from making love to our friend's wife. Or we may wish to take the loved girl to the cinema but refrain because we feel that we ought to sit at home and work for an examination. In the second event in each of these three pairs of alternatives desire

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

conflicts with some other element in our nature; in the second event of the first pair, with feeling for others, altruism, or love; of the second, with our sense of duty or, it may be, conscience; of the third, with the dictates of a dominating purpose. Now, it is by means of will that we seek to resolve these resultant conflicts. Will, confronted by obstacles, takes the form of what we call 'resolve' or 'determination'. Thus, we 'determine' to abstain when thirsty from the glass of water or from the friend's wife, 'resolve' to stay at home and work. Will is also brought into play by a straightforward opposition between desires.

But, here again, I find myself slipping, insensibly and almost inevitably, into the mode of speech which I have declared to be misleading. What I ought to have said is that, once the decision has been taken, it is the whole self which wills determining on study in preference to the cinema, just as it is the whole self which yields, yielding to the desire for the loved woman when so to yield will outrage moral opinion, including one's own, or prejudice the career. In the first case, desire is directed into the service of reason and will, and we say that the self wills or decides; in the second, reason and will are dominated by desire and harnessed to its ends, and we say that the self desires. The conclusions of this discussion may be set out in six propositions.

### *Conclusions*

(1) In all experience there is always an object to which the self responds with appropriate activity.

(2) Different kinds of object evoke different kinds of activity which are the appropriate responses of the self to the object in question, responses which in the case of certain objects we call desire, of others will, of others reason.

(3) Desire, will, reason and so on are, nevertheless, not separate faculties, since it is the whole self which responds, responds as desiring, as willing or as reasoning.

(4) The so-called different faculties of the self, reason, desire, will and so on, are to be differentiated not as different elements or parts of the self, but by reference to the different objects to which reasoning, desiring and willing are respectively the responses.

## AND OF THINKING

Thus, we normally say 'desire', when the object is physically and spatially present, 'will' when it is abstract and not spatially present. (This does not mean, of course, that we *never* 'desire' the abstract and the distant, or 'will' the concrete and the present.)

(5) It is, nevertheless, possible to regard some responses as fuller than others in the sense that more of the energies of our being are harnessed to them, more of the activities of our being caught up in them, more of the potentialities of our being, therefore, realized in them. An integrated man is one who habitually makes to life these fuller responses. It is obvious that some men are more integrated in this sense than others.

(6) These 'fuller' responses are liable to be evoked by the awareness and pursuit of non-spatial, non-temporal 'objects' which are appropriate to reason and, I should add, to spirit, if it be conceded that there is possible to us as spiritual beings a mode of activity which lies above and beyond our activity as reasoning beings, for example, in art or religion. This is because reason, in its character of will, is able to harness and dovetail all the various aspects of our being in its service in a sense which is not possible to the particular individual desires.

The foregoing account is vague and seems at times unplausible, because our modes of thinking are so dominated by the concept of the 'faculty' that it is difficult to find language appropriate to any other concept. It is easier and more convenient to speak of 'desire', 'will', 'reason', than of the whole self functioning in its desiring, its willing or its reasoning aspect. Nevertheless, if we are to accept the logic of our repudiation of the notion of distinct faculties, we must, as it seems to me, make the attempt. Once it is made, it follows that the most appropriate method, in the last resort the only method, of distinguishing one mode of mental functioning from another is by reference to their objects.

### *Some Consequences in Psychology and Ethics of the 'Dropping of the Object'*

It is not for its own sake that I have embarked on an analysis which has led me so far into the field of psychology. A psychological study offered to the reader on merits would require more

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

detailed and elaborate treatment than the brief sketch here presented, and I have not the psychological equipment which would qualify me to undertake it. My purpose has been solely to indicate the kind of attitude to mental processes which the adequate recognition of 'the object' and of the part which 'the object' plays in our experience demands. When the part played by 'the object' fails to receive due recognition, certain important consequences follow which are relevant to my theory of decadence.

(1) The first consequence is determinism. Leave out the object, analyse mental life conatively in terms of impulses, desires, urges, strains, stresses, conflicts and their sublimations and you will find no way of escaping the conclusion that what we do at any given moment is the result of a conflict of pulls and tendencies in which the strongest wins. To be impelled solely from within is also to be determined from within, with the result that an action comes to be represented as the inevitable end product of a series of psychological events, many of which take place below the threshold of consciousness. We may rationalize our actions, justifying them at the bar of reason, or dignify our desires by invoking for them the prestige of morality, but this does not alter the fact that they are nevertheless psychologically determined. Moreover, the very processes by means of which we rationalize and dignify, inventing reasons for what we instinctively desire to believe and pretexts for what we instinctively wish to do, will be no less determined, determined, that is to say, by tendencies operating below the threshold of consciousness, than the desires and actions which they are invoked to justify. 'It may be true,' as Bradley says, 'that we believe what we do upon instinct; but we have none the less an instinct to justify our beliefs.'

(2) The second consequence is that since morals, as Kant convincingly demonstrated, entail freedom, morals also go by the board. It is not merely that, if we are helpless puppets twitched into meanness or nobility, into love or war by whichever string is pulled most forcibly at the moment, we cannot be held responsible for what we do—though this, indeed, would be sufficient to cut away the foundations of morality. More to my immediate point is the fact that morality entails the validity of judgements of value; it entails, in other words, that it means something to say

## AND OF THINKING

that some things are good in themselves and ought to be pursued because they are good, that some things are right and ought therefore to be done, even if the heavens fall; and that this meaning is unique and cannot be analysed into any other meaning or combination of meanings. It entails, further, that we should be able to recognize some at least of these things, to appraise their intrinsic worth, and to pursue them because they are worthy; it entails in other words a knowledge of the 'object' and the capacity to give effect to that knowledge in action. But if our actions are wholly determined by events occurring within, they cannot also be influenced by 'objects' existing outside. If they are the results of a push from within, they cannot also be responses to a pull from without.

Nor is it any answer to say that *on any view* 'objects' outside us produce their appropriate responses, produce, that is to say, events within us and that to maintain that we are wholly determined by events within is not, therefore, to ignore the effects of 'objects' in producing them. For if the events within are merely determined reactions to 'objects', reactions of the same order as the closing of my eyelid when an insect gets into the eye, the flow of my blood when my skin is cut, or, to take a psychological case, the seeing of pink rats when I am in *delirium tremens*, freedom and morality are no more effectively preserved.

When I speak of recognizing 'objects' as possessing moral worth, of pursuing an ideal because it is seen to be desirable, or of endeavouring to do what we *know* to be our duty, I do not mean that the 'objects' determine the responses of valuation, pursuit or endeavour. I should say rather that they incline without determining, believing, as I do, with Socrates that, other things being equal, we have a natural tendency to 'make after' the good, that this natural tendency is deflected and obscured in practice by contrary impulses and desires, but that whether we yield to these or resist them is a matter for our own free decision.

This, of course, is not to assert free will; it is merely to point out (a) that an analysis which leaves out the 'object' is tantamount to denying it, and (b) that a recognition of events within us as being in some sense responses to 'objects' does not exclude it. (I say 'in some sense' because if the response is automatic



## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

free will *is* excluded.) The recognition of the importance of the 'object' both in cognition and in conation is, I should say, a necessary but not a sufficient condition for freedom.

(3) The third consequence is the subjectivist analysis of judgement. That this does indeed follow is, I think, obvious, for if the 'object' is left out of account, except in so far as its influence must be held to produce an automatic reaction on the part of one or other of the forces operating below the threshold of consciousness which in their turn determine our conduct, then the judgements which we make will not be about 'objects' and situations existing independently of ourselves, but will be about our feelings and experiences in relation and reaction to them. In other words, I shall judge not that 'this picture is beautiful', but that 'I experience feelings of aesthetic approval in relation to the picture'; not that 'this belief is true because it squares with the facts', but 'I have a "truth feeling" when entertaining this belief'; not that 'this action ought to be done because it is right', but 'I experience a feeling of moral approval in regard to this action'.

### *Estimate of Koestler's Work*

(4) The analysis is, fourthly, destructive of the notion of objective truth. Since this corollary is, perhaps, less plainly apparent than the others, I will try to illustrate it by a particular example which I take from a contemporary work, Arthur Koestler's *The Yogi and the Commissar*. The title essay of this brilliant book, *The Yogi and the Commissar II*, contains an assessment of the metaphysical implications of modern science which seems to me to be both profound and original. Koestler's is, I think, one of the outstanding minds of the age. He has had a scientific training which enables him to approach the problems both of politics and philosophy from an unusual angle, but he has in addition wide cultural knowledge, while his personal participation in the sufferings of our time makes his work at once more concrete and more intimate than that of most writers on philosophical subjects.

It is, moreover, pervaded by a sense of urgency. The issues he discusses are not, one feels, for him just ideas which may be true or false; they are topical, their relevance is immediate, and

## AND OF THINKING

upon the manner of their conclusion the prospects of our race depend.

With most of his views and attitudes I find myself in fairly close agreement. I think, nevertheless, that he falls victim on occasion to what I am seeking to represent as the distinctive heresy of our age, the 'dropping of the object', leading to an undue resulting upon the self and an undue concentration upon personal experience. My immediate concern is, however, with the bearing of his conclusions on the meta-physical status of truth. I want to show that 'the dropping of the object' is destructive of the notion of objective truth.

### *Commonsense Observations on the Meaning of Truth*

The essay to which I have referred contains a discussion of determinism and free will. For me, the most interesting point about this discussion is that the question, 'is either doctrine true and, if so, in what sense?' is never raised. But, first, what does 'to be true' mean? Taking the concept of truth at the commonsense level, I venture to make two obvious points. First, ideas or thoughts are true, not facts; secondly, it is the existence of facts which makes the thoughts and the ideas which refer to them true. Thus, if I think that a pair of socks is in the drawer, my idea, belief or thought—call it what you will—is rendered either true or false by the presence or absence in the drawer of the socks to which it refers. If they are there, my belief is true; if not, false. But the socks themselves are neither true nor false, nor is the drawer, nor is their presence in it.

The theory of truth is difficult and the complexities into which the serious philosophical student is led are considerable. It is for this reason particularly important to keep in mind the fact that though truth and falsehood are properties of ideas or beliefs, these properties are conferred upon the beliefs by something other than themselves, namely, the facts to which the ideas or beliefs refer. 'I believe it is raining,' I say; you look out of the window and what you see confirms or disproves my belief. If rain is actually falling, you say that the belief expressed in my statement is true; if not, false.

## ‘PSYCHOLOGIZING’ OF MORALS

This, I think, is the most fundamental sense of the word ‘true’; it is also the sense in which we do, in fact, habitually use it. Now, in order that the word may bear this sense it must be conceded that it is possible for ideas to refer to or to describe things other than themselves, so that if they refer to and describe them accurately, the ideas may be true; if inaccurately, false.

It must also be possible for the ideas to be *known* to be true or false; this requirement entails that the things themselves must be known in order that the fact that the ideas correctly refer to them may be recognized. The term usually employed to describe this relation of correctly referring is ‘correspondence’. A true idea or belief, then, is one which corresponds with things, that is to say, with reality.

### *Koestler’s Discussion of Determinism*

Now both determinism and free will are, in the first instance, what are called theories; they are, that is to say, structures of reasoned belief which the human mind entertains in the present and has entertained in the past about the nature of things and the only question, I suggest, in regard both to determinism and to free will that matters, is the question, ‘is either of them true in the sense of true defined?’, that is to say, ‘do either of the structures of belief to which the names of determinism and free will are respectively given correspond with the facts?’ That is what we want to know and that is the reason and the only reason why we concern ourselves with determinism and free will one way or the other.

This, however, is not the question that Koestler raises. He begins his treatment by telling us that ‘both concepts are derived from fundamental instincts, though in different periods they are expressed in different forms’. Of determinism, he says that ‘its instinctual root is probably the feeling of insecurity, a cosmic anxiety which craves for reassurance by “explanation”, that is, the reduction of the strange and threatening to the familiar’.

Volition, ‘destiny’s antagonist’, he defines as ‘the psychological aspect or projection of the interplay of impulses and inhibitions. If this interplay takes place on the conscious level it is experienced as a not-enforced, not-inevitable process of choice’. When the

## AND OF THINKING

processes which result in action are at the focus of attention, we get 'the experience of freedom', defined as the sense that 'the process is working from inside outwards instead of from outwards in'. This experience of free volition is, Koestler holds, indispensable to, perhaps 'synonymous with consciousness'; if it is removed, 'the individual's whole mental structure' collapses. It is also 'implicit in all systems of moral values and ethical imperatives'.

But Koestler never asks whether the belief in freedom is true, or whether the experience of free volition is valid. He never even asks whether there is any justification for it; he is content to conclude the discussion by reiterating the view, that 'both the beliefs in determinism and freedom are rooted in primary instincts: the first in the need for protection by a universal order which "explains" and thus tames the threatening forces of nature; the second in any drive for action—which, when balanced by inhibition and focused by attention, gives rise to the experience of free choice'. He rounds off this conclusion by pointing out—very properly on his premises—that the considerations upon which determinism is based, or, perhaps, I should say, which lead men to embrace it, are just as subjective—the words he uses are 'affective, irrational and pre-logical'—as those which express themselves in the belief in free will.

Much determinism, he says, is theological in origin, god or gods being thought of as ordering the world of nature, including human life, in a particular way. But the belief in a god in nature, 'animism', is itself the expression of an instinctual need; hence 'the conflict between freedom and determinism is a conflict between two instinctual beliefs, experienced in alternation and with equal intensity'.

### *Criticism of Koestler's views. That 'Truth' is Left out*

What is noteworthy in this discussion is, as I have hinted, the restriction of the treatment of both beliefs to the psychological needs which find expression in them. The same needs are presumably responsible for the reasons which men at different times have advanced for thinking one or other of the beliefs to be true.

## 'PSYCHOLOGIZING' OF MORALS

Thus, for the question 'is the belief in free will or determinism true?' Koestler substitutes another, 'what are the reasons which lead people to embrace it?'

I take it that he substitutes this second question for the first, either because he thinks that it is meaningless to enquire whether either belief is true, or because, though he thinks that it may mean something to say of either of the beliefs that it may be true, it is impossible for us to know which of them is, in fact, true. The first alternative would imply that there was no 'object', that is to say, no structure of reality for the beliefs to correspond with; the second, that although there might be an 'object', we could not possibly know it. Koestler's attitude in this discussion constitutes, then, a particular case of what I have called the 'dropping of the object'.

Apart from the fact that, as I have already pointed out, this approach sidetracks the one question that matters, the question, namely, whether either belief is true and, if so, which, it seems to me to be open to an invalidating logical objection. The reasons which have led men to believe in determinism or, alternatively, in free will, are, according to Koestler, not derived from a study of objective facts with which the belief in determinism or, alternatively, in free will would, if true, correspond; they are rationalizations of our fundamental needs and instincts. The reasons do not, therefore, refer to or provide any information about the nature of things; they only tell us something about the needs and the natures of the men and women who have felt constrained by their needs and temperaments to adduce or to invent them. Now Koestler himself must, presumably, have reasons for this view which he advances as to the reasons which have led men to embrace the belief in determinism or, alternatively, the belief in free will. He does not, it is true, tell us in any detail what his reasons are, but from his general attitude it would seem to follow that they are such as may be derived from a study of psychoanalysis. Now, if we are to be consistent, we must apply to these reasons which Koestler accepts and which influence or determine his view—reasons which we will call R2—the same mode of treatment as he applies to the reasons—which we will call R1—which have led people to embrace the beliefs in determinism or, alternatively, in free will. These reasons he has, by implication,

## AND OF THINKING

stigmatized as cheats, since while they purport to give us information about determinism or free will, they do, in fact, reflect only the minds of those to whom they seem convincing and presumably, therefore, give us information only about those minds.

But if this is a valid method of assessing reasons, R1, it is also valid for the assessment of reasons, R2. For these, if we are to place any reliance on Koestler's method of treatment, do not, in fact, refer to the objects to which they purport to apply, namely, the reasons, R1, for believing in determinism or, alternatively, in free will, but do refer to the person to whom they seem convincing, namely, to Koestler himself who advances or accepts them; and the sort of information they give will not be information about determinism or free will but will be information about Koestler's needs and nature which lead him to find just these reasons convincing and not other reasons.

If, in short, R1 are rationalizations of need, so are R2; if R1 do not constitute valid grounds for believing in determinism or, alternatively, in free will, since they do not in fact refer to them, R2 do not constitute valid grounds for believing that R1 are not valid grounds for believing in determinism or, alternatively, in free will, since R2 do not apply to the 'objects' to which they ostensibly apply, namely R1, any more than R1 apply to *their* ostensible 'objects'.

What I am here doing is to apply to Koestler's mode of treatment and to the arguments he adduces in its favour, the mode of treatment which he himself applies to the belief in determinism or, alternatively, in free will and to the arguments which are adduced in its favour. Just as he does not ask about the belief in determinism or, alternatively, in free will, whether it is true in the sense of 'true' which I have defined, but is only concerned to point out the needs from which the belief springs, so I ask about this view of his, not, 'is it true?', but 'from what instinctive need does it spring?' For, if Koestler may legitimately 'drop the object' and with it the question of truth in discussing the beliefs in determinism and free will, I with equal legitimacy can 'drop the object' in discussing Koestler's beliefs about the beliefs in determinism or, alternatively, in free will, and in 'dropping the object' I, too, can waive the question of truth.

## ‘PSYCHOLOGIZING’ OF MORALS

### *Return to Main Theme. Relevance of the ‘Psychologizing’ of Truth*

To return to my main theme, Koestler’s mode of treatment is typical of much of the thinking which is inspired by modern psychology. It is natural to those who have been trained psychologically to ask about a belief, theory, view or proposition not the question, ‘is it true?’ but another question, ‘why is it that the believer holds or advances it?’ This, I say, is natural enough, for if ‘the object’ is dropped, no question can arise as to the truth of the belief in the sense of ‘true’ which I began by defining—namely, that of correspondence with fact; the only question which can legitimately arise is, ‘what are the instinctive needs of the holder of the belief and how far is the belief adequate to serve the purpose for which it was entertained, namely, that of satisfying those needs?’ But by parity of reasoning there can be no question of the views which psychologists hold about the matter under consideration being true; there can be only a question of the instinctive needs of the psychologists who hold them and of their adequacy in meeting those needs. If the views of a believer in determinism or free will cannot be true because there is no ‘object’ for them to correspond with, the view of the psychologist who maintains that they cannot, cannot be true either.

I conclude (i) that the ‘dropping of the object’ puts the question of truth out of court; (ii) that if this conclusion is accepted, there can be no valid, that is to say, true reasons for thinking that it does so. One cannot, in fact, use reason to undermine the belief in reason, nor, having dropped the notion of truth, can we proceed to say of the reasons which have been responsible for the undermining and the dropping that they are true.

I have sought to show (1) that there is today a widespread tendency to ‘drop the object’ with which it would normally be regarded as the business of a belief to correspond; (2) that this has the effect of precluding beliefs from being objectively and independently true; (3) that psychology has played a considerable part in fostering this tendency.

## CHAPTER X

# The 'Dropping of the Object' in Biology and Social Ethics

### *Preliminary Observations on Scales of Social Measurement*

I propose in this chapter to examine the consequences of the 'dropping of the object' in social ethics. By 'social ethics' I mean that branch of study which seeks to determine what things are good and what bad in societies and to grade societies by reference to a scale of values on which their position is determined by the degree to which they embody the things which are deemed to be good and their contraries.

A straightforward ethical approach on these lines is not often made. Writers on sociology and social ethics speak of 'advanced' and 'developed' societies and of 'backward' and 'primitive' ones. It is, of course, implied that it is better to be 'advanced' and 'developed' than to be 'backward' and 'primitive', but, if one were to ask what in this connection is meant by 'betterment', it is difficult to obtain an answer. The commonest answer to the question would, I imagine, be given in terms of material goods, an 'advanced' and 'developed' society meaning, for most people, one in which man controls nature and enjoys as a result a high standard of physical well-being more particularly in respect of food, clothing, warmth, gadgets, the multiplication of material possessions and frequency and rapidity of transport. As further effects of this control he has leisure and a wide area of choice as to ways of behaving and diverting himself in his leisure.

Societies are also spoken of as 'decadent', by which is meant that they have ceased to advance and have begun to retrogress. This does not necessarily mean that they have begun to take in a



## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

reverse direction the journey which they made when they advanced, so that they will presently return to the point from which they began their advance. What, then, does it mean? As the earlier chapters of this book will, I hope, have shown, it is exceedingly difficult to say. Vague as they are, however, such expressions as 'advanced', 'developed', 'backward', 'primitive', 'decadent' and, of course, 'good' and 'bad', do imply standards of measurement. Moreover, the standards must be other than the societies which they are invoked to measure and which are graded by reference to them. Thus, the standard might be set for us by the acceptance of some goal or purpose, irrespective of its nature. All societies, it might be said, aim at a goal and have a purpose and their end is to reach the goal and to fulfil the purpose. They can be graded, then, in terms of advancement or backwardness, as they are nearer the goal or further from it, as they fulfil the purpose more completely or less. Or we might insist that the *nature* of the end must be taken into account, and that a society which had achieved a small degree of approximation to a desirable end was more advanced than a society which had largely succeeded in realizing one that was relatively undesirable.

### *The Social Values*

In point of fact it seems very difficult to leave out of account the *nature* of the end pursued. Is there, then, one wonders, a standard by reference to which some ends can be adjudged better than others? Such a standard would be afforded by the admission of the existence of absolute values. I have frequently invoked these in previous chapters and must here assume their existence. The standard values are goodness, truth and beauty and most of those who are prepared to admit the existence of any values would almost certainly endorse these three. There is also, Plato taught, an absolute value of justice.

Those who have been influenced by the teaching of Christianity are, I think, committed to the addition of certain further values, for example, mercy and compassion, as well as a number of absolute obligations, for example, the obligation to treat the individual as an end and never merely as a means. I am myself

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

sufficiently habituated to utilitarian modes of thought to insist on the inclusion of happiness.

Justice, happiness, mercy, compassion and the acceptance of the duty of treating individuals as ends in themselves which, incidentally, entails tolerance, are among the values and obligations specially appropriate to the life of men in societies—though all, I think, are in the last resort derivable from the three traditional values. More precisely, they afford a standard or ruler of measurement for the grading of societies in respect of their worth, so that we can say of a society which observes in its legal system more justice, embodies in its customs and ways of thought more tolerance, in its relations between its members more mercy and compassion, and in the lives of its citizens more happiness than another society, that it is intrinsically more admirable than that other society. We ought, therefore, to strive to bring about the one and to eschew the other. If the former exists, we should try to perpetuate it; if the latter, to supersede it.

Now, though there may be disagreement in regard to any detailed list of the social values which might be proposed, most people would, I think, accept those that I have mentioned as being, in truth, valuable.

The admission carries with it four corollaries: (1) That the values are desirable and ought, therefore, to be pursued. (2) That they afford a standard of measurement. (3) That, as in the case of any other standard of measurement, they must be other than the things, in this case the societies, which they are invoked to measure and cannot be wholly generated by them.

Similarly, if we regard the values as goals, saying, for example, that a good society is one which approximates more nearly than a bad one to a condition in which the values of mercy, tolerance, justice and the rest are embodied in the laws, in institutions and in public opinion and behaviour, the goals must be other than the process of society's advance towards them; for it is, to me, self-evident that that which is a part of or internal to a process or movement cannot be the goal of the process, just as the winning post cannot be attached to the legs of the racing horses, or the place of his pilgrimage carried in the pack of the travelling pilgrim.

One other conclusion is, I think, entailed. It is (4) that we should

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

know in a general way what the values are which we have accepted as standards of measurement or as goals, and should agree that they are indeed values, since if we do not know this, we cannot know whether a society is advancing or not, and cannot, therefore, tell whether there is or is not progress. As G. K. Chesterton pointed out in an essay in *Heretics*, 'Progress, by its very name, indicates a direction; and the moment we are in the least doubtful about the direction, we become in the same degree doubtful about the progress'. The point is surely obvious enough. Yet it is so frequently overlooked that I cannot resist the temptation to illustrate it. If I am standing in the Strand midway between Charing Cross and Temple Bar and set my legs in motion, there is movement, there is process; but unless I know whether I wish to go to Temple Bar or to Charing Cross, it is impossible to assert either that there is or that there is not progress. Indeed, it is equally meaningless to say that I am progressing and to say that I am not progressing. Chesterton's conclusion is: 'I do not, therefore, say that the word "progress" is unmeaning; I say that it is unmeaning without the previous definition of a moral doctrine, and that it can only be applied to groups of persons who hold that doctrine in common.'

Reverting to the terminology I have used in previous chapters, I should say that the social values, whether conceived as standards, ideals or goals, perform in the sphere of the social sciences the office of what I have called 'the object'. Unless the 'object', as so defined, is admitted to exist and to be independent both of our apprehension of it and of our efforts to achieve it, then all judgements which seek to grade societies in order of merit, as, for example, historical judgements which convey approval or disapproval of a particular period, or praise or dispraise of a particular statesman, or anthropological judgements which purport to assess the degree of advancement or backwardness of a particular tribe are, I should say, strictly meaningless.

### *The Need for Standards of Measurement in Biology and Sociology*

What is true of the development of men in the societies and civilizations studied by anthropology and history is true also of

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

the development of living organisms studied by biology and zoology. When these are graded in point of advancement or assessed in respect of desirability, it is implied that there are standards and goals which are other than the evolutionary process to which they are applied; standards to serve as rulers of measurement, goals, as ends of development. Thus, when one says that one organism is higher in the scale of evolutionary development than another, then, unless one means by 'higher' merely 'later in point of time', it is implied that one has in one's mind some conception of 'height' by reference to which the two organisms are measured, so that one is judged to have more of it than the other. To reject this concept of an external standard is to commit a tautology similar to that committed by exponents of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, who, when asked what the word 'fittest' meant, had no answer to suggest but 'fittest to survive'.

It is not difficult to see that the effects of the 'dropping of the object' in relation to biological and sociological processes are similar to those which follow the 'dropping of the object' in relation to human experience. Since we are left without a standard of measurement by which to measure living processes, we are inevitably led to suggest that the changes which biology records in species and history in civilizations constitute a development and embody therefore an increasing instalment of good, just because they occur, just as in ethics we are led to suggest that all human experience is a good, simply because it is experience. Dr. Waddington has put this view in a phrase which bids fair to become a classic, 'we must,' he says,<sup>1</sup> 'accept the direction of evolution as good, simply because it *is* good'.

There is an old-fashioned Victorian optimism about this which sits strangely upon a twentieth-century biologist. But the significant similarity of this view to the doctrine of the inevitability of progress seems to have escaped the notice of those who advance it.

For my part, I cannot do other than accept the hint afforded by the similarity between the Paterian doctrine of experience for its own sake and the Waddingtonian doctrine of evolution for its own sake<sup>2</sup> and regard both as examples of a mode of thinking, a mode which I have ventured to call decadent, which both reflects

<sup>1</sup> In *Science and Ethics* ; see p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 95, 96.

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

the mood of the society from which it springs and reinforces the tendencies which it reflects. The Waddingtonian concept offers, indeed, an outstanding example of what in previous chapters I have called the 'dropping of the object'.

So much having been said to indicate the general argument of this chapter, let me try to illustrate it with a more detailed examination of some contemporary biological and sociological thought. I will take as my example a celebrated controversy which broke out during the war in the columns of *Nature*, and, as the exponents of the view to which I am taking exception, two eminent biologists, Dr. Waddington and Dr. Julian Huxley. I make no apology for treating in some little detail the views upon philosophical subjects of these non-philosophers, since not only are they in one form or another widespread in contemporary thought, but they afford an illuminating illustration of my conception of decadence or, more precisely, of opinions that I take to be characteristic of a decadent society.

### *Controversy in 'Nature'*

The controversy in *Nature* was started in the autumn of 1941 by an article which Dr. Waddington contributed to that journal entitled *Science and Ethics* upon which the editor of *Nature* invited comments from other scientists. The comments expanded into articles, the psychologists weighed in, especially the psychoanalysts, followed by the philosophers and the theologians; the Marxists disclosed or invented the 'Marxist point of view' and Waddington and others wound up. The whole controversy aroused enough interest among scientists, philosophers and general readers to justify its subsequent republication in a book entitled *Science and Ethics*. I do not here propose to explore the many issues into which the controversy ramified. I confine myself to the one point—it is, I think, the central point—which is not only immediately relevant to the theme of this chapter but has also, for me, a psychological interest.

### *Whose Blind Spot?*

This psychological interest arises as follows. A man can often see how it is that people disagree with him; he believes

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

them to be wrong, but he can see that there is some reason for their disagreement, and being, after all, a reasonable man, he concedes that it is quite possible that they may, after all, be right. But it is infrequent, when controversies are conducted between dialectically accustomed persons with academically trained minds upon matters which do not directly—though covertly, of course, they may—rouse the sleeping dogs of emotion, for one of the parties to be completely at a loss to understand why his opponents, his highly intelligent opponents, should be unable to take what appears to him to be a painfully obvious point, so that he is driven to suppose either that they have a blind spot or that he has. Such, however, is my predicament in regard to this particular controversy. The point at issue turns upon and so brings us back to the question which I raised above of the need for goals or standards for the measurement of social progress.

### *Examples of Subjectivist Ethics*

The position adopted by Waddington in this controversy reappears in many contexts, particularly in the writings of scientists, and it has a more extreme and a less extreme version. Of the more extreme I will take Waddington himself, of the less extreme, Julian Huxley as a representative spokesman. Common to both is the view that ethics is not an objective study; it does not, that is to say, give us information about a moral order subsisting in the universe independently of ourselves and discovered by the developing mind of man. Ethics is a product of our own creation, an emanation from human consciousness, whose origin belongs to the realm of anthropology. In an earlier chapter<sup>1</sup> I have summarized the account which is given by the exponents of this view of the origin of ethics. Briefly, it is to the effect that early peoples find certain kinds of conduct and character conducive to the internal harmony and survival of the tribe, other kinds militating against them. They naturally tend to encourage the former and to discourage the latter. Encouragement takes the form of praise and reward; discouragement, of blame and punishment. It follows that in order to win the approval of the tribe, in order,

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vii, pp. 153–5.

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

indeed, to survive at all, the individual must cultivate certain qualities and follow certain rules. He must also make certain valuations, terming certain things 'good' and 'right'. By these words he means that the things so termed are pleasure-producing, expedient, or power-promoting, expedient and power-promoting resolving themselves in the last resort into indirect pleasure-producing. He terms others 'bad' and 'wrong', by which he means that they tend to be followed by consequences which are the reverse of pleasure-producing. Here is Waddington's statement of this view: 'Strictly speaking, one cannot say that the propositions of ethics arise from experience of external, as opposed to internal, connexions; their origin is the observation that the world is such, and the personality is such, that the individual must follow certain rules' . . . 'Experience teaches those techniques which lead to pleasurable results, and do we still need to invoke some non-experimental criterion to judge, not what gives us pleasure, but what *is* pleasurable or good and what bad?'

The process of ethical valuation once started goes on for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years until in the end the tendency to call things 'good', 'bad', 'right', 'wrong', for utilitarian reasons because they give pleasure, confer advantage, promote concord, or do the opposite of these things, gradually becomes stamped into the racial memory and appears as inherited instinct, or is embedded in the social tradition which the child accepts unhesitatingly from its environment. As a result, there is ultimately evolved a generation with an inherited tendency to call certain characters and modes of conduct good and bad in themselves, in ignorance of the reasons which originally led their ancestors so to dub them. Hence conscience, hence feelings of guilt and remorse, hence intuitive moral judgements and valuations, and hence, too, so-called objective ethics which mistakenly takes these feelings and judgements as signs of a something external to and independent of ourselves which the feelings report and the judgements evaluate. But so to take them is merely to project our own subjective moral preferences and prejudices, whose origin is derived by traceable steps from non-ethical considerations, into the world outside ourselves and to regard them as attributes of things in themselves. Similarly religion projects on to the canvas

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

of a meaningless universe figures of power and watchfulness who we have invented for our comfort and assurance, and then hails with a naïve delight as objective realities what are, in fact, the shadows of ourselves. In a word, just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.

### *What is Meant by the 'Development of Society'*

The extreme statement of this general view with particular reference to its bearing upon the evolution of society comes from Dr. Waddington. 'Society,' he observes, 'develops in a certain direction.' The historian notices, for example, that as they develop societies become more comprehensive. Thus, a more developed society can 'include the earlier stage, as . . . American culture can include that of the Red Indian but not *vice versa*'. This characteristic society shares with whatever is essentially evolutionary. 'An existence which is essentially evolutionary', says Dr. Waddington, 'is itself the justification for an evolution towards a more comprehensive existence.' At this point Dr. Waddington finds it necessary to introduce ethical terms, and we come to the celebrated phrase, already quoted, enjoining us to accept 'the direction of evolution' as a whole—and, therefore, of developing societies which are part of the evolutionary process—as 'good, simply because it *is* good according to any realist definition of that concept'.

Moral principles, modes of conduct and judgements of value further the evolution of society in the direction of its line of development. They are, therefore, 'good' because they 'mediate the motion' of society 'in that direction', which is why society adopts them.

Now the factors which assist the development of society are open to inspection by the appropriate sciences. According to the account of the origin of ethics just summarized ethical principles are among these factors. Hence the double conclusion, first, that 'science is in a position to make a contribution to ethics, since ethics is based on facts of the kind with which science deals'; and, secondly, 'the nature of science's contribution is also clear; it is the revelation of the nature, the character and direction of the evolutionary process in the world as a whole, and the elucidation



## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

of the consequences, in relation to that direction, of various courses of human action'.

### *Recapitulation of General Objections*

Such, in brief, is the theory. It seems to me to be open to objection on many grounds. I have, indeed, already adduced arguments against the contentions that considerations of good and right can ever be exhaustively analysed into considerations of expediency, and that the analysis of a living and developing product, for example, the ethical consciousness or religious sense of a civilized community, exclusively in terms of its origins can ever be completely satisfactory, in the same way, for example, as the analysis of a machine into its component nuts, cranks, bolts and springs may be satisfactory.<sup>1</sup> The very fact that there is more in the developed product than there was in the germ from which it has developed forbids an *exhaustive* analysis in terms of the germ. Hence, to give an adequate account of a developing thing, we must, I have suggested, look not only to its roots but to its fruits; not only to the origin from which it may have taken its rise but also to the end which it may be seeking to achieve, or the purpose which it may be endeavouring to fulfil. However, I waive this and a number of cognate matters because, as I said at the beginning of this examination of Dr. Waddington's views, I want to throw into high relief one particular point which the last-mentioned consideration will serve to introduce.

### *On Standards of Measurement*

The point, that valuation or measurement of any kind implies a standard which is other than and independent of the processes which it is invoked to measure, has already received general statement at the beginning of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is so frequently and, to my mind, unaccountably ignored, that I offer no apology for making it again. I am saying, then, that it only means something to say that three apples and two apples are five apples, if there are numbers as well as apples; or that a man is six

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vii, pp. 156, 157.

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

feet two inches high, if there are feet and inches in the world as well as men. Similarly, when we value something as good or bad, we imply that the terms have a meaning which is independent of the something which they are invoked to evaluate. These considerations seem to me to be self-evident. Let us apply them to Dr. Waddington's attribution of the epithet 'good' to the direction of evolution. They result in the conclusion that if the word 'good' means anything, its meaning cannot be wholly derived from or bound up with the movement to which it is attributed as a characteristic, any more than a ruler can be part of or an attribute of the length which it measures, or a man can lift himself by his own braces.

Dr. Waddington points out that the later stages of evolutionary development include the earlier. Certainly they do, but how does this affect the issue? The later stages of a travelling snowball include the earlier, but that does not mean that the snowball's journey is ethically valuable or worthy of praise. It may not even be well advised ; if it is heading for a precipice, it is ill advised ; but the precipice, the goal, is other than the snowball.

Similarly, with Dr. Waddington's concept of development. Development no less than progress implies, as I have already pointed out, not only movement but movement in a certain direction, and the notion of direction entails that of goal which cannot be part of the process which seeks to realize it.

Once this is understood, it will be seen that the kind of question which Dr. Waddington is putting, when he applies the notion of 'right direction' to evolution, and then proceeds to inquire whether its present direction is in fact 'right' is, if we are to adopt his premises, like the question 'is it better to take the righthand fork or the left?' when asked by somebody who does not know where he wants to go ; while further questions relating to the speed of the advance are like asking whether it is better to travel in a forty or a ten horsepower car, when you don't know where you are travelling or whether it is good to travel at all.

### *The Criteria of Comprehensiveness and Integration*

Lacking any standard of external reference which can be invoked to measure the movement of individuals and societies,

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

lacking any conception of 'good' to serve as a goal by reference to the degree of their approximation to which the progress of societies may be assessed, refusing, in fact, to admit what I have called the 'object', Dr. Waddington has to fall back upon the palpably inadequate concepts of greater comprehensiveness and greater integration. These serve his turn because they are wholly internal, as it were, to the developing organism. As applied to the development of societies they are, nevertheless, wholly inadequate. They may mean one or other of two things. The first, that any later stage of a society is *better* than any earlier stage because it includes it. This sounds perilously like the doctrine of automatic progress, with the millennium, in the shape of an all-inclusive world society, awaiting us in a completely determined future. But societies not only advance, they decay. In fact all societies known to history, with the possible exceptions of India and China, have decayed and collapsed. Nor have they been less inclusive or less comprehensive during their decadent periods. Rome in decay was exceedingly comprehensive. Is one, then, to call the process by which a society gradually decays and finally collapses a process of development, merely because it is movement in a certain direction and because we must accept 'the direction of evolution as good simply because it *is* good'?

The alternative reading of the conception of development is in terms of integration. Biologists frequently speak of close integration as the mark of a highly developed organism, all its parts being, as it were, closely geared up to a central directive agency. The concept of integration is unfortunately far from precise and could no doubt be shown to bear a number of different meanings. In terms of the meaning I have sought to give to the word in the last chapter,<sup>1</sup> I do not doubt that integration of 'faculties' is a characteristic of high development in the individual. But, as applied to societies, its meaning is all too clear. The most highly integrated State is that envisaged by Hegel and Fichte which stands to its component individuals in the same relation as that of a living body to its organs and cells, dominating them, pervading them and depriving them of individual will and initiative. In action it is the Nazi State or the Spartan State. I

<sup>1</sup> See chapter ix, p. 217.

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

should not like to think that the development of society is necessarily in this direction; still less to apply the term 'good' to it, if it is. I should not even like to think that Dr. Waddington thinks this; but it is certainly what on his premises he *ought* to think.

### *Huxley's Statement of the Subjectivist View*

I call the version of this view put forward by Julian Huxley less extreme because professedly it admits the possibility of objective ethics. Thus, in his Romanes Lecture, delivered in the summer of 1943, Huxley speaks of 'possibilities as having value in and for themselves', value, that is to say, which is presumably independent of us and of our valuations. Now that which is valuable independently of us and of our valuations cannot be merely an externalization of our subjective aspirations.

Nevertheless, in spite of occasional inconsistencies, Dr. Huxley's view is not in essence very different from Dr. Waddington's. There is, first, the familiar explanation of ethical sentiments in terms of their origins. 'Ethics,' Dr. Huxley says, 'is the name we assign to the results of the workings of a particular psychological mechanism. This ethical (*sic*) mechanism is an agency for securing that certain of our actions and thoughts shall be consciously felt and judged to have the qualities of rightness or wrongness.' How does this mechanism work, or, what is more to the point, how does it arise? The psycho-analyst is invoked to tell us. When the mother first dawns upon the consciousness of the child, she does so under two aspects, that of the provider, the protector and the lover, and that of the dominator, the forbiddler and the punisher. In the first aspect she is loved, in the second, feared and hated. As a result there is a conflict in which love wins, or at any rate usually wins, and the contrary sentiments, the hate, the anger, the aggression, become tainted with guilt, become, in fact, shameful and wrong. Nor is this all; the Oedipus Complex may begin to exert its influence, causing the boy to hate his father because he is his rival for the mother's love and so on. Yet he feels it to be wrong to hate his father whom he also loves. From these origins develop those feelings of rightness and wrongness,

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

of conscience and of guilt with which our actions and sentiments are subsequently invested.

### *Restatement of Criticisms of Subjectivist Ethics*

In criticism of this account, I venture to restate here certain considerations already advanced in chapter vii. (1) Huxley's treatment seems to involve a simple confusion between what *is* right and what is *thought* right. We all think different things to be right and what we will think right (or wrong) depends no doubt very largely upon our early needs and conflicts. But it does not follow that what we *think* right is the same as what *is* right; indeed, unless the concepts 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad' had for us a meaning which is independent of our thoughts about them, it is difficult to see how they could ever have arisen. For (2) if 'X is good', or 'X is right', means the same as 'X is pleasant', or 'X is expedient', or 'X is useful' how, I asked,<sup>1</sup> did the distinction between good and right on the one hand and expedient and pleasant and useful on the other ever come to be made? If what is good or right is, in the last resort, exhaustively analysable into what is expedient or pleasant or useful, then it is impossible to account for the origin of the distinctions which in common speech we do habitually make. It seems reasonable, then, to suppose that the words 'good' and 'right' stand for concepts which we specifically distinguish from those denoted by the words 'pleasant', 'expedient' and 'useful'.

(3) In chapter vii<sup>2</sup> I also sought to show that the reference to the early history of mankind is no more than a device for putting back in time the problem that arises for explanation now. I pointed out that the view that ethical motives arise out of entirely non-ethical considerations presupposes there was a time when the distinction between 'X is good' and 'X is pleasant' or 'X is expedient' was never made, for the reason that nobody ever judged disinterestedly that 'X is good'. Now there must, on this assumption, have been a moment in the history of mankind when the distinction first came to be made. But why, I asked, did it come to be made, if it is meaningless? If the arguments given above

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vii, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 155, 156.

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

lead us to accept the view that the distinction is meaningless now, they are equally valid against the assumption that it was meaningful at any time.

Once this is realized, it will be seen that the relativity of, the divergence between and the variations in moral judgements upon which Huxley lays stress do not lead, as he seems to think they do, to the conclusion that ethical standards, principles and values, that is to say, what *is* right and what *is* wrong, are *themselves* relative and changing; the conclusion to which they do lead is that our *notions* about ethics, that is to say the names 'we assign to the results of the workings of a particular psychological mechanism', are relative, divergent and varying.

### *Impossibility of Measurement and Assessment on Huxley's Views*

I return here to the main point of this criticism, the point which is raised just as pertinently by Huxley's account as by Waddington's. Looking at evolution as a whole, Huxley comes to the conclusion that the 'evolving world stuff' is 'introduced to progressively higher levels of organization'. For example, it now, as we have seen, realizes 'possibilities as having value in and for themselves'. Huxley terms the development of 'the evolving world-stuff' in this direction 'desirable'. What is 'desirable' is 'ethically right'. 'In other words,' he says, 'it is ethically right to aim at whatever will promote the increasingly full realization of increasingly higher values.' This is very muddling, especially as the 'higher values' apparently include the value of ethical rightness. But the muddle arises from the attempt to make use of the advantages attendant upon a concept of value which is external to and other than the developing evolutionary process, without actually committing oneself to postulating the existence of a value so conceived. For, to postulate it, entails the admission that the universe contains a moral order existing independently of us; entails, therefore, that the natural order is not the only order and that there is an area of the universe—that, namely, which contains objective values—which is permanent, independent of us,

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

unaffected by the evolutionary process and, incidentally, inaccessible by the methods of science. It entails in short the admission of the 'object'. Apart altogether from their incompatibility with the conceptions which Dr. Huxley develops in other parts of his lecture, it is obvious that these admissions accord very ill with the notion of 'an evolving-world stuff' which is apparently an all-inclusive stuff. Yet I do not see how the admissions are to be avoided, nor do I see how Dr. Huxley can avoid them. For, to return to the point upon which I have insisted throughout, what can he mean by 'higher values'?

### *Implied Admission of the 'Object'*

To say that A is higher than B entails, as I have pointed out, that 'higher' means something independently of A and B, and that it is by reference to this independent 'something' that the word 'high' means that I judge A to have more of it than B has. Similarly, to say 'it is ethically right to aim at whatever will promote the increasingly full realization of increasingly higher values' entails a double reference to an external standard; there is, first, the standard of 'ethical rightness' by which the 'evolving-world stuff' including evolving societies, evolving organisms and evolving individuals are judged and exhorted—they *ought*, it is implied, to aim at this, rather than at that. Secondly, there are the external standards by reference to which the values which serve as the ends or goals of the evolving process are themselves assessed, some being adjudged to be 'higher' and presumably, therefore, more valuable than others. Both references entail the existence in the universe of factors other than the processes which the factors are invoked to measure. What meaning can we attach to these 'factors' unless they bear witness to an objective moral order which the developing human consciousness recognizes but does not create? It is by virtue of our recognition of this order and of the standard it supplies that we are enabled to pass judgement on the evolutionary process, affirming some phases of it to be more advanced or developed—not merely later in time or more comprehensive—than others. It is by reference to the same order that we divine the ends or goals of the process, apprehending them as truth, as

## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

beauty, as goodness, or even as God in which event the values will be the modes of His manifestation.

To sum up this line of criticism, the considerations commonly thought to militate against objective ethics are beside the point, for, once the distinction between what is right and what at any given moment happens to be thought right is admitted, it is not difficult to make provision for the changing and relative nature of ethical judgements by pointing out that the degree to which the features of the objective moral order are at any moment disclosed and recognized varies not only with the degree of intellectual development, but also with the temperaments, needs and wishes of the human consciousness which recognizes and values.

### *Summary*

(1) My purpose in this chapter has been to illustrate in two further spheres, namely, those of biology and social ethics, the pervasiveness in modern thought of the attitude which I have called the 'dropping of the object'.

(2) The prevalence of this tendency arises from the refusal to recognize an area or order of the universe at once timeless and perfect which is outside the process of evolutionary change.

(3) Once this order is admitted, it serves as a standard both for ethical and political judgements and for biological appraisal. It affords both the scale of values by which the worth of biological species and of political societies can be measured, and an end or goal by the degree of their approximation to which their future progress can be gauged.

(4) The refusal to admit the existence of this order of reality is bound up with the contemporary decline of religious beliefs and the repudiation of moral principles. It also has affinities with the view that experience is an end in itself and that there is no standard beyond experience by reference to which of two experiences one may be adjudged more desirable than another.

(5) This view of experience I have sought to identify with some part at least of the content of the concept of decadence. Hence,



## BIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ETHICS

the view of social ethics criticized in this chapter would seem to be a not inappropriate form for the thinking of a decadent society to assume. It is at once the mirror and the prop of that thinking in the sense that it both reflects the factors in the society wherein its decadence consists and, by lending them the countenance of its prestige, confirms them and contributes to their growth.

PART II

APPLICATIONS. DECADENCE

OUR TIME



## Introduction to Part

### *Method Proposed*

The intention of Part II is to illustrate the general principles set out in Part I. The obvious method is to take acknowledged examples of decadence and to show that they do, in fact, illustrate the principles. This method is unfortunately vetoed by the absence of acknowledged examples. It is, of course, true that in literature, in art and in social life there are many examples which some, perhaps most, would regard as decadent, the Roman Empire of the third and fourth centuries, it may be, among societies, the English writers of the 1890s, perhaps, in literature. But, apart from the fact that there are no accredited examples of decadence to which *all* would subscribe, this mode of treatment is exposed to a more serious difficulty. The best in the way of an all-embracing definition that I have been able to suggest is the formula which in Part I I have indicated by the phrase, the 'dropping of the object'.

I propose, then, to proceed on the basis of this formula, applying it to such developments in art, literature and society as it can be made to cover, and then to put it, as it were, to the reader, whether he would not be prepared to accept these developments as tolerably eligible candidates for the title of 'decadent'. If he finds that to any appreciable extent he would be willing so to accept them, then his acceptance will tend to substantiate the formula and to justify the method.

This high *a priori* method of proceeding is exposed to the danger that I shall be unable in painting, in art, in literature, in the life of society and in politics to resist the temptation of picking on those developments which happen to incur my disapproval or dislike, stretching and twisting my formula to cover them and then triumphantly convicting them of decadence. I am

## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

sensible of this danger and shall do my best to guard against it, but I am very conscious that I am far from having overcome it. The formula does, in fact, on occasion become in this second part a flail for the castigation of the objects of the author's dislike; yet since I believe the formula to be not wholly] beside the mark, I cannot wholly abjure its use or deny myself the pleasure of its application. Besides, I do not know how else to proceed.

### *Argument of the Book Summarized*

Let me, then, here try to throw the formula into relief by summarizing the philosophical view which underlies it and which it is designed to express.

This, briefly, is to the effect that the life of man is set in a universe which is far from being exhausted by the world of things in space and time which are known to us by means of our senses; that in addition to this world the universe contains immaterial factors not perceptible to the senses but apprehensible by the mind and the spirit, which I call values; that these values manifest themselves in particular things, some, though not all, of which belong to the sensible world—beauty in works of art, truth in history, in science and in philosophy, goodness in the characters, actions and relations of human beings—but that they are not made up of, nor exhausted by, their particular manifestations; that the values stand for or, more precisely, are an expression of the element of perfection in the universe, an element which through their mediation is manifested, but at best only partially manifested, in particular things.

It follows : (1) That perfection is not to be found in the human or in any possible development of the human. (2) That the notion of human development through the process of evolution in time is meaningless, unless there is something other than the evolutionary process to serve both as a standard to measure, and as a goal or end to direct its advance. This 'something' I take to be the immaterial world of value. (3) That it is only in so far as men accept the existence of this immaterial world in their theory and seek to increase the degree of their awareness of and contact with it in their practice, that the human mind advances in respect

## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

of knowledge, the human character in respect of goodness and the human spirit in respect of the perception and love of beauty. In other words, it is in the knowledge of and intercourse with non-human values that we shall find the recipe for good thinking, for good morals and for good art. (4) That when these truths are neglected or forgotten, the following beliefs tend naturally to spring up:

(a) that the process of evolution, just because it occurs, is a process of *development* and is, therefore, a good, irrespective of its direction; and

(b) that the occurrence of human experience, just because it occurs, has value and that experience is, therefore, a good irrespective of its quality.

These beliefs naturally commend themselves when what I have called the 'object' drops out. This is because to 'drop the object' is to discard the notion of an end or goal for the evolutionary process which has objective value independently of the process, and, since we must value something, what else can we value save the process itself? Similarly, to 'drop the object' is to deny that there can be an object of experience which is external to the experience and which has objective value independently of it, and, since we must value something, what else can we value save experience itself? In short, if we refuse to recognize non-human ends and objects, the human itself becomes the end and we shall look for perfection to an infinitely extended development of the human.

This attitude, which I have provisionally identified with decadence, leads in art to the doctrine of expression for its own sake, irrespective of what is expressed, and in morals to the doctrine of experience for its own sake, irrespective of the quality of the experience. I am further suggesting that these doctrines tend to the production of bad art, since the self, unfertilized by the not-self, loses value as a source of expression, and to non-significant and unzestful living, since where every enjoyment is permitted on the ground that all experience of whatever kind is desirable, it is presently found that nothing is enjoyed. If men take all that they desire, they find that desire loses its savour.

Such is the general position which underlies the formula that I have called the 'dropping of the object'. In illustration of this

## INTRODUCTION TO PART II

position, I propose to cite phenomena in the contemporary world which do, as it seems to me, in various ways exemplify the 'dropping of the object' and then to ask the reader whether he does not, in fact, agree that they constitute plausible examples of ostensible decadence. As Aristotle pointed out, we must, in this sort of discussion, rely for most of our evidence on the deliverances of the popular consciousness. Hence, if I can secure the reader's agreement, my success will go some way to establish my formula.

### *Manner of Part II*

I cannot in this second part continue the strictly philosophical mode of writing which I have adopted throughout most of the first; nor, indeed, is the subject matter that lies ahead adapted to this mode of treatment. When you are discussing current tendencies in literature and art, still more when you are animadverting upon the existing policies of contemporary States, it is the language of the interested and, therefore, partial critic, rather than that of the disinterested and therefore impartial observer which flows naturally from one's pen. Those who are easily affronted by expressions whose warmth or whose acerbity tinges with emotional colour the flat austerities of the philosophical treatise will, therefore, be well advised to omit this second part, as those who find pure philosophy difficult or meaningless are counselled against discouraging or distressing themselves by dwelling upon Part I.

## CHAPTER XI

# The Culture of the Many in All Times but particularly in Our Own

## 1. INTRODUCTORY THE PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

### *Author's View of the Universe*

As I have just hinted, the analysis of decadence contained in Part I, an analysis which sought to identify the concept of decadence with the 'dropping of the object' resulting in a concentration on experience for its own sake, was not undertaken solely for the interest of the analysis. I had the additional purpose of seeking so to apply its results as to be in a position to assess some of the phenomena and tendencies of our own age.

Let me, first, briefly indicate the general background from which the ensuing essays in application will proceed. The universe, as I have suggested, consists of different orders or levels of being. One such order or level of being is deity. Deity is manifested in what we know as values. The most eminent of the values, as they are the most easily apprehensible by us, are goodness, truth and beauty. Deity and the values in which deity manifests itself constitute the order of being which I call reality; the spatio-temporal world which common sense knows and science explores constitutes another order of being to which, precisely because it is always changing is, that is to say, in a state of flux, Plato gave the title of 'becoming'. The world of becoming is, by the standard of reality, semi-real.



## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

### *The Nature of Man*

Human beings, by reason of the fact that they have bodies, belong in part to the world of becoming. They have, however, also minds; they are also, I should add, spirits. For it seems to me that the traditional division of the human being into the three categories of body, mind and spirit, which belongs to the central tradition of that *philosophia perennis* which takes its rise in Plato and runs through the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages down to our own time, covers more of the facts than either the dualist division into mind and body, or the psychological division into the faculties of reason, emotion, instincts, appetites, sentiments, and so on.<sup>1</sup> In virtue of our being or possessing spirits, we are in some sense members of the world of reality.

I think that the mind is largely, though not wholly, determined by the body but that the spirit is, at least in part, free of the body and is a witness to the manifestation in us of another order of reality or, to put it theologically—and this after all is, I suspect, the best way to put it—a witness to the presence in us of a spark of the divine. I have chosen the words ‘largely’, ‘in part’, and ‘in some sense’ deliberately, in order to indicate the impossibility of introducing clear-cut lines of division. There is, for example, no clear-cut line between mind and spirit, and mind, therefore, is not wholly determined by body, nor spirit wholly free of body; nor is it true to say without qualification that the spirit is the immanence of the divine. It is, however, I believe substantially correct to think of man as a member of two orders of being; of the sensory world to which his body belongs, which he experiences through his senses and knows with his mind, and of the real world in which he participates by virtue of his spirit. The real world is primarily revealed to us in the knowledge of values, in moral experience, in the appreciation of beauty and in the recognition of truth. But this knowledge is not merely an activity of the mind, but is itself infused with spirit. In other words, it is because we are ourselves participators in reality that we are enabled to know it.

I further believe that it is natural to man to endeavour to increase in respect of his participation in and knowledge of reality.

<sup>1</sup> I have already repudiated this; see chapter ix, pp. 202–16.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

As the poets and mystics have put it, he seeks for permanence amid change and decay, for perfection amid imperfections or, more simply, for God. As I have put it in this book, he aspires after truth, goodness and beauty, which in their degree are made manifest to him in his present condition. He seeks, therefore, to know, to become a better man and to appreciate beauty. It is chiefly by reason of this attribute that he is differentiated from the beasts, is, in fact, a being set apart. Beauty, truth, and goodness in all the different modes of their manifestation, in art and literature, in nature, in science, in scholarship and in learning, in good actions, fine characters and just institutions are all, in their different ways, included within the meaning of the term, the 'object', as used in Part I. Thus, in seeking to know the 'object', in striving after it and in communing with it, man is fulfilling the demands of his spirit, and aspiring after reality. I have also maintained that value belongs to the 'object' but not, except derivatively, to the mind that knows it, the relation of the mind to value being that of knowing, of appreciating, of striving after, but not that of embodying. But I have excepted from this generalization the indwelling of value as goodness in the human personality.

### *Some Preliminary Observations on Kinds of Spiritual Experience*

A decadent age is one in which the 'object' is lost or in which its character of independence is denied, with the result that value, instead of being recognized in the object known, is appropriated by the knowing mind and so becomes identified with the experience of the knower. This identification is chiefly met with at the higher aesthetic and intellectual level, that is to say, in the minds of those who mould the thought and set the standards of the community, the level of the artists, novelists, thinkers, scholars, scientists and political leaders. At lower levels, at, for example, the level of ordinary folk who are not and never have been conscious strivers after the good, the beautiful and the true, the symptoms are different. It would not, for example, be true to say of them that they 'dropped' an 'object' which they never consciously apprehended; or that they tend consciously to adopt a subjectivist

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

analysis of judgement or deliberately to concentrate upon experience as an end in itself. The many, in short, are not philosophers. For them at nearly all times and, indeed, for all of us at most times, the 'object' is food, drink, money, games, amusement, desirable positions, houses, sport, the other sex. All these 'objects' belong to the spatio-temporal order, nor have we any temptation to analyse them on subjectivist lines as merely modes of our own experience. At this level what I have called the 'dropping of the object' exhibits itself in an extreme concentration upon material things and material values, in an indifference to beauty, a semi-contemptuous patronage of art, a depreciation of knowledge for its own sake combined with a purely utilitarian attitude to education, in a decline in respect of the practice of the specifically Christian virtues, notably compassion, gentleness, humility and mercy—above all, in an indifference to or contempt of religion which expresses itself in an aggressive scepticism combined with an absence of religious experience and a disinclination to concern oneself one way or the other with the matters which belong traditionally to religion's sphere.

In so far as this attitude receives conscious expression in the formulation of doctrine, it may be recognized in such phrases as 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', 'I don't know anything about art but I do know what I like', 'one man's taste is as good as another's', 'there's nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so', 'religion is wish fulfilment' or 'the opium of the people'. I want to consider how far these symptoms may be discerned in our own age.

### *The Subject Introduced via Art and Literature*

I shall draw my examples chiefly from these two spheres and for two reasons. Art and literature are, if I am right, among the responses of the human spirit to reality manifested as value. Now this is not a religious age and, so far as that direct response to reality which mystics and others have made is concerned, the spirit of Western man sleeps. We are, in other words, poor in respect of religious experience. (With the response of the human mind to the value of truth I have, by implication, been engaged

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

in the first part of this book and am, indeed, still engaged. In philosophy the 'dropping of the object' expresses itself in a refusal to apply the philosophical method to its traditional subject matter, that is to say, to a consideration of the nature of the universe as a whole, or to the problems and distresses of our times and the mode of their alleviation.<sup>1</sup> This book is a modest attempt to bring philosophy back to what I take to be its traditional function.)

Since religion remains a closed preserve for most of us, the spirit of contemporary man is moved chiefly by beauty. Beauty in art, music and nature is, indeed, the chief spiritual food of our generation; beauty is, as it were, the stop gap which keeps us spiritually alive until either religion comes once more into its own, or the flickering spirit peters out altogether.

The second reason for my choice of art and literature for purposes of illustration is that I, too, am a child of my age. I have no qualifications to write on religion, for I have little experience with which to nourish such opinions as I might venture, and few qualifications for writing about goodness. For this reason, it will be easier both for the writer and for most of his readers to consider the response of the contemporary mind to value and its manifestations by an examination of our attitudes to art, in which I include music and literature, and also to nature. In this chapter, I shall say something of the *popular* response to art and nature; in the next chapter, of the response of the educated minority.

### *The Classes of Spiritual Goods*

It follows from the sketch of a philosophical view attempted at the beginning of Part II,<sup>2</sup> and the more particular sketch at the beginning of this chapter, that there are certain activities and experiences which lead the mind in the direction of value. To quote a striking phrase of Plato's, they 'wheel the soul round from the perishing world to the contemplation of the real world and the brightest part thereof'. They are experiences which are sometimes called spiritual, but they include aesthetic experience,

<sup>1</sup> See chapter i, pp. 28-35.

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction to Part II, pp. 248-50.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

some forms of personal relation and the higher ranges of intellectual activity. It is not, I think, difficult to discern and recognize them both in one's own life history and in the records which others have left. I will briefly enumerate their main classes.

First, there is the experience of responding to good painting and good music. I cannot here pause to answer the question what I mean by the word 'good'. I am assuming that there are certain standards of taste and that one man's opinion is not as good as another's. It is not a satisfactory answer to the question, what in this connection do you mean by 'good', to say that I mean those works of art in which the value of beauty is manifested, and that by 'good taste' I mean the ability to discern it when it is present and not wrongly to assert its presence when it is absent. The answer is not satisfactory because its effect is to confront the answerer with another question, namely, what do you mean by 'beauty'? I must here be content to leave the matter enclosed within a circle, and to say that beauty is that which is discerned and appreciated by persons of taste. Statuary, architecture and furniture are subsidiary channels through which similar experiences flow to us. But in pictures and music the stream is clearest and richest.

Secondly, there is our pleasure in nature, for nature is also such a channel, though I think that part at least of the experience that we obtain from nature belongs to a different category.

I think that the experience of beauty in nature and the experience of beauty in art overlap. For example, what we feel for the line of a down seen against a darkening sky or the spire of a cathedral rising from the flat Fenland country belongs generically to the same class of emotions as we feel for a picture. Our pleasure in nature is, however, in general more mixed than our pleasure in art. It is mixed, in the first place, with physical elements—the perspiring ascent of a mountain is a definite element in our pleasure in the view from the top, as the hard breaths we draw over spade and plough make a definite contribution to our pleasure in garden or farm landscape. It is mixed, in the second place, with instinctive elements. There are certain places, for example in my own case, some small valley in the low foothills of mountainous country set with dwarf trees and bushes down which

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

runs a stream through outcrops of rock, which touch some ancestral chord in our being and fill us with a sudden inexpressible delight. And because it is more mixed, it is less pure, less disinterested. This is not, of course, to say that our pleasure in nature may not be keener and more satisfying precisely because it gathers up more of the elements of our responding being, than our pleasure in painting or in music.

There is, thirdly, the experience of reading great literature both in poetry and in prose, not excluding the prose of fiction. This is a pleasure more confused and impure than that which we derive from music and painting and the element of pure form, which is the clearest medium of beauty's manifestation, is more thickly coated with meanings derived from life. Yet it may well be that for most of us it is, for precisely that reason, a fuller and more satisfying pleasure.

There is, fourthly, the experience of disinterested intellectual activity in the pursuit of truth, activity motivated only by the desire to discover what is the case, which is exemplified in its purest form, in mathematics, philosophy, history and the pursuit of scientific knowledge and also, though less purely, in a vast range of semi-utilitarian intellectual disciplines, as, for example, in economics, sociology, and the higher ranges of administrative activity.

Fifthly, there is the experience of goodness in others and the experience of moral endeavour in oneself. There is, finally, religious experience. Of all the forms of spiritual activity this is the clearest and leads the mind by the shortest and most direct route to reality. But of this, more particularly in its purest form of mystical experience, our age, as I have said, knows little.

These, then, are the main types of experience which are directed upon and are responses to what I have called the 'object'. As there is no suitable generic name to apply to these experiences as a whole, I have been driven, in spite of the misleading associations of the word, to term them 'spiritual' for want of a better word. A spiritual experience, then, is the mind's response to the impact of some manifestation of reality. Three general observations may be made about such responses:

- (1) They bear witness to the existence of another order of being

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

of which they give us information. This is because their 'object' belongs to an order of reality other than the spatio-temporal order.

(2) We are capable of enjoying these experiences only because we are in respect of some part of ourselves inhabitants of that same order. The experiences are thus distinctively human in the sense that no animals enjoy them.

(3) It is in the increase in the number, range and intensity of these experiences that the future progress of mankind consists. Those ages in which they are few or are diminishing are, therefore, non-progressive ages, are, in fact, decadent.

### *The Capacity for Spiritual Experience*

I propose to consider the present condition and future prospects of some of the experiences I have named. I begin by suggesting four propositions :

(1) Most people are to all intents and purposes devoid of spiritual experiences. As to whether they are or are not capable of them, I offer no opinion. I am content to note the fact that they do not have them.

(2) Many competent judges hold that this is not a special feature of our age; it has, they say, always been the case and, in their view, always will be the case. Thus, H. A. L. Fisher in his *A History of Europe* expresses the view that 'Philosophy, erudition, the critical examination of texts, the passionate pursuit of art for art's sake, these activities will always be confined to a small intellectual minority of the human race'.

(3) The small intellectual minority which enjoys these experiences enjoys them for a very small proportion of its time. All of us spend by far the greatest part of our waking life in satisfying desires, performing actions and thinking thoughts which are focused upon what Plato calls 'the world of becoming', and most of us so spend all our time.

(4) The influences of the age in which we live are in a pre-eminent degree hostile to these experiences. In the many these influences combine to encourage a total 'dropping of the object'. The few who are capable of the intermittent apprehension of value

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

in some one or other of its forms, are led to substitute a value for experience itself for a value for the 'object'.

In this chapter I shall be concerned with the first of these classes, the class of the many, who seem to be largely devoid of the experiences in question, and for the reason already given, I shall take my examples chiefly from the spheres of literature and art.

### 2. THE POPULAR CAPACITY FOR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IN OUR TIME

I take at random a number of instances which I cite as typical.

#### *Reading*

Comparatively few people read anything except newspapers, technical books and worthless fiction. I travelled recently in a train from Edinburgh to London. The journey normally takes eight hours and in this case the train, which was very full, was nearly three hours overdue. The passengers were chiefly soldiers who had long exhausted the meagre delights of looking out of the window and the slender resources of one another's conversation. Hour after hour they sat, bored and low in spirit, and to not one in a hundred did it occur to relieve their boredom, even in circumstances of such extreme provocation, by taking out a book. 'Not one in a hundred' I said, and accusing myself of customary exaggeration, decided to put the matter to the test. I made my way along the train through my protesting fellow travellers with a view to seeing how many I could count before I reached the first book reader. I took into my survey both officers and other ranks. I counted up to 104. Number 104 was an officer reading *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* by James Hadley Chase.

Libraries publish figures which show that since the beginning of the last war the proportion of non-fiction to fiction in books which readers demand has grown. It has, indeed, grown but for two reasons ; (a) fewer books of all kinds have been produced and far fewer books of fiction have been produced. People have, therefore, been driven to rely upon and resort more often to



## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

older books. In regard to these, two things may be said. First, the proportion of non-fiction to fiction published in the past was much higher than it was in the third decade of the twentieth century; secondly, worthless fiction tends to be pulped. It may be taken by the libraries at the time of its publication but it is not kept by the libraries. Meanwhile an estimate recently prepared of books taken from the twopenny circulating libraries shows the proportion of fiction to non-fiction as eleven-to-one. (b) There has been a large increase in the writing and reading of technical books which has weighted the scales against fiction.

### *Music*

Here is an item provided by Sir Kenneth Clark :

'The B.B.C. listeners' research department has discovered that the most popular form of music was the cinema organ with a listening figure of eighty-five per cent, and the least popular was the string quartet with a listening figure of five per cent—the lowest figure which the research department thought it worth while recording.'

People speak with pleased surprise of the new popular demand for good music, citing in particular attendances at National Gallery concerts and at popular performances of operas. I make two observations. First, let us note the significance of the fact that the feeling *is* one of surprise. Here, it seems, is a considerable number of people who are prepared to listen to good music. It is not at all what one might have expected. Why not? Because one knows it to be a fact that it is very rarely indeed that people do like good music. This at least is true of English people. The fact that so much stress is laid upon the size of attendances at the Albert Hall 'Proms.' and the National Gallery concerts, coupled with the pleased surprise with which the figures are greeted and the pride with which they are quoted, points to a different conclusion from that which those who cite the figures are accustomed to draw. The conclusion is, how little is good music valued in a society in which that is a matter for surprised self-congratulation which, had the society been civilized, one would have taken for granted. The Elizabethans would have been neither surprised nor

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

gratified. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that only five per cent of English towns have concert halls.

Secondly, the figures are, in fact, not large but small. The population of Greater London is eight millions; the number of those who attended a National Gallery concert was between 700–800; the maximum holding capacity of the Queen's Hall was between two and three thousand. In other words, one out of every three thousand Londoners went to the Queen's Hall Proms. on a full night. If this method of computation be thought unfair, let me add that within a three-miles radius of the Queen's Hall are one hundred cinemas many of which seat as many persons as were at any given moment sitting or standing in the Queen's Hall. But the fact that people went in such numbers to cinemas aroused no comment; it was precisely the sort of fact which one took for granted.

### *Painting*

As in the case of music, the war is said to have been responsible for an increase in the popular interest in and appreciation of pictorial art. I do not know on what evidence this belief is based. The Arts Council of Great Britain, known during the war as C.E.M.A., has taken pictures into many towns which were previously without them, and no doubt the novelty of the event has attracted to galleries and shows many people who wanted to see what pictures were like. But in London, where there are and always have been pictures and where, therefore, there is no element of novelty, the trend before the war did not bear out the view that the popular interest in art was either great or growing; on the contrary, it was diminishing. In 1928, for example, 665,000 people visited the National Gallery; in 1934 the number of visitors had dropped to 531,000. For the same two years the figures for attendances at the Tate dropped from 349,000 to 262,000, and at the Wallace Collection from 131,000 to 75,000. These figures are not impressive for a city of eight millions. That the quality of popular taste is not more impressive than its volume the following quotation which I venture to take from Sir Kenneth Clark abundantly demonstrates:

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

'The indifference and ignorance of the average man' [in the matter of painting and sculpture] 'is so great that the usual method of sampling would produce no results at all. But in 1938 a popular publishing house produced two volumes of reproductions of paintings of which they sold 80,000 copies, and asked the readers to let them know which of the pictures reproduced appealed to them most. The result may be taken as a fair sample, bearing in mind that it is drawn from that small section of the public already sufficiently interested to buy a book on painting. About eighty per cent of the pictures illustrated were genuine works of art ranging from the "Mona Lisa" to the "Age of Innocence". Only ten per cent were of the *Pears' Annual* Christmas Supplement school. The odds were, therefore, weighed very heavily in favour of good painting; and yet not one of the first six pictures chosen was drawn from that category. The ship in full sail, the Alpine valley full of gentians, the cottage garden full of Dorothy Perkins—these triumphed by an enormous majority.' I do not believe that it will be necessary to add further examples. Readers will be able to supply them from their own experiences.

### *The People's Love of Nature*

Many would hold that it is through the avenue of nature that beauty most easily reaches the moderns or, at any rate, the modern English. Art and music we may regard with indifference or contempt, but natural beauty, it is said, comes home to the heart of all of us. Look at the abundance and excellence of our nature writing, particularly of our nature poetry; look at the naturalist clubs, the rambling clubs, the Youth Hostel movement, the thousands who flock into the country at week-ends. We are on the threshold here of a vast and controversial discussion into which I do not propose to enter.<sup>1</sup> I put it, however, here on record that, in my view, these beliefs are a delusion. The number of people who care for natural beauty is relatively very small, nor is it true that the countryman, whose intercourse with it is, it is to be assumed, constant, cares any more than the townsman

<sup>1</sup>I have entered into it at length in a recent book, *The Untutored Townsman's Invasion of the Countryside*.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

whose intercourse is intermittent. I have not found that farmers or agricultural labourers have keener and deeper feelings for beauty than visitors from the town. Nor am I deceived by the pleas—‘Ah, they feel but they are inarticulate and cannot express their feelings’; or ‘Their feelings are not shallow like the townsman’s; they lie too deep for words’; or ‘The countryman does not wear his heart on his sleeve’—or by any of the other sentimentalities with which townsmen seek to blind themselves to the fact that the countryman has, for the most part, no feeling about the country except the desire to get out of it as quickly as he can by motor bike, or motor bus, or even by walking an inordinate distance when his day’s work is done to the nearest town which means, in practice, the nearest cinema and the nearest dance hall.

Let me cite two or three illustrations. In the main street of the village where three ways meet stands an immemorial rooted elm. Round its great trunk runs a seat where old men sit and gossip. The elm seems part of the village; part, too, of the surrounding country, and by its presence fits the village into the environment of hedge, field, orchard and coppice as a figure may be fitted into a landscape by a skilful painter. A number of the villagers have recently signed a petition to have the tree cut down. Their reasons are: (1) that the roots go under their gardens, (2) that the leaves keep off the sun, (3) that the blossom blows in spring into the houses necessitating constant sweeping up. That the elm was old, dignified and beautiful; that there attached, or should attach to it the reverence born of long tradition—many generations of villagers had, after all, been born and reared in its shade—none of these things had any weight.

Manufacturers have erected in a field not far from the roadside a large tin plate or plaque advertising their name and products in staring colours of yellow, green and red. The plate is well ‘teed up’, the site having been chosen—well chosen from the advertiser’s point of view—in such a way that the eye of the traveller along a fine stretch of road is affronted for a good mile from whichever direction he may come. A friend spoke to the owner of the field about this defilement. The remonstrance provoked not resentment but mystified surprise; the owner simply could not

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

understand what the ground of the objection was. The advertiser paid rent to the amount of five shillings a year, and that, he said, was good enough for him. What other consideration, he intimated, could there after all be? My friend offered to pay the five shillings if he would ask the advertiser to remove the sign. This proposal nettled him as pious folly is always apt to nettle a man. He refused point blank; he did not, he pointed out, wish to offend the advertiser who, after the war, might rent some more space.

Road mending in the neighbourhood recently entailed the destruction of a number of Elizabethan cottages whose beauty was not less than their antiquity. They had recently been modernized inside and were dry, convenient, and comfortable. The pink cube boxes of hideous design which subsequently replaced them were welcomed by the residents. 'No,' they said, 'they were not more convenient, but they "looked better".' 'I don't want to live in them old-fashioned places,' one resident added. 'I like to move with the times.'

I give these incidents because they are typical, typical of the indifference of country dwellers both to beauty and to tradition. By and large, they have no feeling for their inheritance of natural and man-made beauty and feel no desire to protect and preserve it. Noise, destruction, ugliness, these things they do not mind at all—in fact, they welcome the noise—provided that they do not inconvenience them personally.

As for the townsman, he is afraid of solitude and slightly embarrassed by beauty. His demand is for the cutting of more roads across the land, weals laid by the whiplash of civilization upon its face, that he may travel the more rapidly from one thronged beauty spot to another, where he may revel to his heart's content in ever changing garages in which to fill up, ever fresh picture postcards to buy and to send to his friends, ever new tea shops to sample. In fifty years' time the beauty of England will have been largely destroyed, but our grandchildren, not knowing what they have missed, will feel no sense of loss, just as a community of congenitally deaf men would not know that they were missing the joys of music. That the loss of the faculty for the appreciation of natural beauty would be an impoverishment of human life, few, I think, could be found to doubt. It would mean that man

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

had retrogressed in respect of one of his most lately acquired attributes, an attribute of spirit. For the appreciation of beauty is a spiritual experience. The loss of this attribute would be both a sign and a part of decadence.

### *The Case of Primitive Art Considered*

It might, of course, be contended, as H. A. L. Fisher contends,<sup>1</sup> that the great majority of people have not in any age been interested in beauty or shown any capacity for its appreciation. It may even be urged that they are incapable and always have been incapable of spiritual experience. There is no doubt some truth in this contention. Indigenous forms of art, folk music, peasant pottery and costumes, the weaving of fabrics, the production of drawings, paintings and modelling have, no doubt, in some ages sprung from what is called 'the people'. But it is, I think, reasonably certain that these periods of production among primitive peoples have been short and unrepresentative. Moreover, it may be doubted whether the appreciation of these works extended beyond a tiny proportion of the total number of 'the people' who would commonly be said to have produced them. 'The people' as a whole, no doubt, used the utensils which primitive artists had produced, looked at the designs and listened to the songs and took them very much for granted, but that they had no real appreciation of the value of the things which they took for granted may, I suggest, be deduced from the almost invariable facility with which undeveloped peoples allow themselves to be attracted to and corrupted by the products of our own mass-produced civilization, whatever they may be, with which they come into contact, by glassware and metal utensils from Birmingham, by gimcrack furniture from the East End, by pottery from Staffordshire, by cheap jewellery, gaudy finery, picture postcards, top hats and the records of jazz bands and crooners' voices. Moreover, the corrupting effect seems to be permanent. Our civilization—the fact must be faced—infects whatever it touches and, once contact has been made, the productions of native art wither away.

The case of primitive art affords, then, no convincing refutation

<sup>1</sup> See quotation on p. 258 above.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

of the generalization that the number of human beings which is capable of enjoying beauty in art is, and always has been, small. Let me again quote from Sir Kenneth Clark:

‘However widely art is distributed, however tactfully shown and intelligently explained, it will still appeal only to a small minority. This need not dismay us if we cease to think in terms of crude quantity and statistics, if we recognize, as few people do, the difference between thousands and millions. If we say that at the very best one per cent of the population might be enabled to enjoy art, it sounds pessimistic. But put it the other way round; in fifty districts of Great Britain an average of 10,000 people enjoy works of art. That doesn’t sound too bad. That is worth striving for. That would seem to justify all the money and trouble expended on this peculiar form of human activity. Yet it remains only one per cent of the whole population.’

But will it continue to be one per cent?

While we may agree that the number of those who in any age have cared for art is few, there are, I suggest, influences at work in our own age which are in a special degree antagonistic both to the production and to the appreciation of beauty; so antagonistic that it is not unplausible to suppose that within a couple of hundred years original art, together with religion, may die out.

## THE EFFECTS OF SCIENCE AND DEMOCRACY

An enumeration of some of the reasons for this antagonism may throw light upon the subject of our general enquiry, namely, the applicability to our age of the concept of decadence.

### *(A) The Effects of Science*

First, the climate of our age has been largely formed by science. The essence of scientific method is quantitative measurement. Now, broadly speaking, only those things which are physical things, are, that is to say, pieces of matter extended in space, are susceptible of being quantitatively measured. ‘This human body

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

is two feet taller than that one'; 'This plate is twice as hot as that one' and so on. But, it may be asked, is not heat a quality? The answer is that it is not for science, which translates heat into readings on a thermometer and for the phrase 'twice as hot' substitutes the number of a reading on a Centigrade thermometer which is double another number on the same Centigrade scale. Most so-called qualities are susceptible to this quantitative treatment. Thus, a scientist, confronted with the qualitatively different colours, violet, mauve and blue, will analyse them into waves of numerically different frequencies and lengths in the electromagnetic spectrum. I am not suggesting that this process of analysis and reduction is satisfactory in the sense of being exhaustive—the distinctive characteristics which we know in sensory experience as those which belong to the colours violet and blue are obviously lost in the process—but it is useful for practical purposes and is typical of the scientific mode of analysis. Indeed, it is not too much to say—Eddington has, in fact, said—that it is only in so far as it can reduce its subject matter to the quantitatively measurable that science can deal with it at all. Now, most people are interested not in science but in its applications. They value it not because it gives knowledge but because it increases wealth or speed or productive capacity. Science, in other words, is valued because of its usefulness. Now the undoubted practical usefulness of science in terms of results is responsible for a tendency to judge the value of *every* form of activity by its results.

Consider art from this point of view. The value of art is not susceptible of quantitative measurement, nor are the emotions it arouses expressible in quantitative terms. Moreover, art has no results and is, therefore, useless. It follows that an age whose standards have been set by science will either despise art or look to it for effects and results which it is incompetent to give. For example, it will tend to insist that beauty is in some sense relative to function. If a thing serves the purpose for which it is made, serves it adequately and efficiently without waste or fuss, then, it is implied, the thing will somehow be beautiful. In a word, if it is useful, as useful as it can be made to be, it will also be beautiful. But the application of this criterion, the criterion of usefulness, with a resultant emphasis on economy and adequacy in the



## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

performance of function, is irrelevant to beauty. Some beautiful things, for example, the colours of a hoopoe's head, or the line of a down seen against a darkening sky, are useless; some useful things, for example, sardine tin openers and bulldozers, are not beautiful. As the result of the continued application of false criteria of judgement, the relevance of true criteria is forgotten. Assessment of beauty in terms of function presently becomes chronic, becomes, in fact, a feature of the civilization which habitually resorts to it.<sup>1</sup>

### *(B) The Effects of Democracy*

Some of these reinforce the effects of science; for democracy also relies upon the method of quantitative measurement. It elects its government by counting heads. It also demands that whatever goods are proffered for its approval shall be useful; demands, that is to say, that they shall contribute to the health, the comfort, the wealth, the prestige or the power of its members. Since the majority of the citizens of a democracy have never had enough of any of these goods, they naturally tend to identify a sufficiency of them with *good as such*, as a prisoner identifies liberty, a man dying of thirst identifies water, or a man starved of sex identifies women. This tendency is not, of course, peculiar to a democracy; the many have never had enough health, wealth or comfort, but it is only in a modern democracy that the many have begun to make their needs and desires felt; only in a modern democracy that hopes are held out to them that their needs and expectations will be gratified; only in a modern democracy, therefore, that the many set the standards of 'the desirable'.

*(i) The Decision by Counting Heads.* Others of the effects of democracy are peculiar to itself. Under a system of electing representatives by voting one man's vote is as good as another's. Once the desirability of deciding issues by majority vote is conceded, it is difficult to set limits to its application. Hence, the process of deciding issues by counting heads fosters the view that one man's head is as good as another's; as good as another's,

<sup>1</sup> A fuller treatment of the influence of science on the arts in general and architecture in particular will be found at the end of the next chapter. See chapter xii, pp. 315-18.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

for example, when it comes to deciding questions of art. Therefore, what is best in pictures and in music is what most people happen to like. This tendency is reinforced by the circumstance that things which most people happen to like become, by reason of the fact that they do like (and want) them, the most expensive things. To equate the most expensive with the most valuable involves another application of the quantitative criterion.

(ii) *Conflict of Feelings in the 'Middle-Brow'*. A further tendency hostile to good art derives from the snobbery of culture which is one of the last surviving expressions of the snobbery of aristocracy. Because of the snobbery of culture cultivated 'high-brows' can still within limits dictate the tastes of 'middle-brows'. The 'middle-brows' both envy and resent this power; hence, every new and incomprehensible art form upon which the 'high-brows' have set the seal of their approval, for example, Mr. Britten's music or Picasso's pictures, engenders a disturbing conflict of feelings.

The 'middle-brow's' reactions may broadly be summarized as follows:

(a) There is nothing in it.

(b) Those who pretend to see something in it must, therefore, be posing. They are culture snobs.

(c) I hate them for this.

(d) Why do I hate them? Because I can never quite rid myself of the suspicion that they may have something that I haven't got and see something to which I am blind. This means that I can never be quite sure that I am not being 'done out' of something.

After all, a civilized man gets more out of life than an uncivilized; that he does so, the uncivilized dimly suspects. His suspicion makes him uncomfortable and he can never forgive the civilized for making him feel it.

When to this complex of feelings is added the democratic assumption that every man is as good as his neighbour, it is not difficult to see that the civilized man's possession of some indefinable quality of taste or discernment, coupled with his fluency and confident facility in the critical chatter of the studio and the concert hall, will bestow a prestige which constitutes an offence against the democratic canon of equality.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

Such is the reaction of the 'middle-brow' and it brings in its train a natural hostility to the art which is at bottom responsible for this disagreeable medley of feelings.

(iii) *Disillusionment of the Masses.* The reactions of the uneducated masses are also hostile; but this hostility springs from a different source. Before they received any education, the masses suspected that life held many important things from the enjoyment of which their lack of education shut them out. Because they could not read, they were debarred from literature; before the days of the B.B.C. and the Arts Council of Great Britain they heard no good music; they had never seen the pictures of great painters. Hence they were enabled to assure themselves that stored up in art and music and literature were great treasures of spiritual wealth, constituting a world of culture of which they, the disinherited, would one day be made free. This feeling was a source of that strain of aspiring idealism which was one of the most valuable features of the early Socialist movement.

Then came the era of popular education with the result that everybody was enabled to read and to write. Public libraries offered to unlock the world's stores of learning and culture for those who entered their portals, while Everyman's Library and its successors and competitors offered cheap reprints of the world's great books. Presently Penguins and Pelicans made the many free of all that was best in contemporary literature. Good music was broadcast on the radio, the Arts Council fostered the production of concerts and plays in provincial towns, while travelling exhibitions of pictures began to tour the big towns. In a word, the temple of culture was opened and the many were made free of its treasures.

And, lo and behold, there was nothing in it; at least, for the great majority there was nothing. They could not understand the books; the music bored them; they were puzzled or repelled by the pictures which seemed to them a gross misrepresentation of the objects they knew. And so they concluded that culture was 'phoney' and art 'a racket'; they had, as they would put it, 'been led up the garden' and 'sold a pup'. Disillusion ensued and with the disillusion came resentment against those who had for so long trumpeted the virtues and values of worthless goods, coupled

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

with an angry contempt for those who, as it seemed, still pretended to enjoy them.

(iv) *The 'Ripe Plum' fallacy.* Why did the newly enfranchised multitudes make this mistake, the mistake of supposing that culture could be had for the asking? It is easy to reply that nobody had taught them any better, but the answer is unhelpful, for who could have taught them better? They had left school at fourteen before they were capable of benefiting from a demonstration of the value of the arts had such been given, and only a tiny proportion, one out of twelve according to figures given by Ernest Green,<sup>1</sup> Secretary of the Workers' Educational Association, submitted themselves voluntarily to the disciplines of adult education.

Meanwhile all the influences to which their leisure was exposed combined to suggest that entertainment, amusement, enjoyment, pleasure in all their forms could be had by paying for them. And so they could at a certain level. The joys of the holiday camp, light music, the cinema, the dance hall, the racecourse and the greyhound and motor cycle racing tracks—all these need nothing but the money to pay for them and the leisure to attend them; the more money, the more leisure—here the quantitative scale of measurement once more introduces itself—the greater the enjoyment. Three hours contain three times as much enjoyment as one hour; the view from the stalls is twice as good as that from the gallery, and so on!

*That Common Enjoyments are Easily Enjoyed Enjoyments.* The whole effort of those who provide entertainment for the public consists in making the enjoyments which they offer as easy as possible and as universal as possible. They seek, then, to cater for the most inattentive consumer and for the highest common

<sup>1</sup>The relevant passage from Mr. Green's book is worth quoting in its entirety. 'In the records of the best year less than one in twelve of the insured population took any advantage of the facilities available and of those who did so only one out of every 108 students were interested in any of the social sciences. A fraction over two-thirds of the students followed courses of a professional or vocational character and the balance of the remainder was fairly evenly divided between domestic science and physical training, with a small residue interested in cultural subjects. These estimates exclude W.E.A. and University extra-mural classes, sixty-three per cent of which were in social subjects. But W.E.A. and University classes represented only 60,000 out of a total of nearly 1,250,000.' (These were pre-war figures.) From *Education for a New Society*, by Ernest Green (1942).

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

factor of public taste. Now these two demands are the same demand, for that which all of us enjoy in common is also that which makes the smallest call upon our effort and attention. When the widest area of surface must be covered, it is reasonably certain that only the surface will be touched. Films, guaranteed not to arouse thought, present beautiful women in smart or splendid surroundings calculated to catch and to ravish the glance of the roving eye. A sufficient expenditure would enable one to gaze upon these goddesses and a great expenditure to become like unto them. To listen to radio, drama or to light music, one had only to turn a knob ; to enjoy the thrills of the racing track or the football field, to pass through clicking turnstiles. Now all these things could be had quite simply on terms. You had only to pay enough and they were yours for so long as you chose to enjoy them. It was natural to conclude that all the joys of which the human mind and spirit are capable could be had in similar fashion on the same terms ; inevitable that sooner or later these notions should be applied to literature and the arts, where they issued in the view that the mouth of the expectant patron had only to be opened and the greatest that has been said, thought, painted and composed would fall into it like a ripe plum.

*The Difficulty of Art.* This belief is, of course, a delusion. Great books are often difficult to 'get into' ; they contain, particularly in their earlier chapters, boring passages, and we must submit ourselves to the direction of the author before we can feel his spell. To do this we must bring to him a quiet mind and faculties at cutting edge ; also we must be prepared to pay him the compliment of attention while he is being read and of reflection when the reading is finished. 'Not to spend as much time,' says Arnold Bennett, 'in thinking about what we read as in reading it is an insult to our author'. This, perhaps, is a counsel of perfection, yet something of the kind is clearly necessary if our reading is to affect our lives, and this, as it seems to me, if literature is to give us all that it has to offer, is precisely what it must do. To quote Bennett again :

'The success of a book with the reader is to be measured by its effect upon the actual daily existence of the reader. If a book excites thought ; if it stimulates the sense of beauty, the sense of

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

sympathy; if it helps in any way towards the understanding of one's fellow creatures; if it moves to laughter or to tears; if it increases the general vitality; if it throws light on dark problems; if it discloses the broad principles which govern the movements of humanity; if it awakens the conscience and thus directly influences personal conduct—if it accomplishes any of these things, then it has succeeded.'

Bennett is thinking primarily of fiction and *belles lettres*, but the application of the truth that his remarks embody to philosophy, to history, to science, indeed to any and all the studies and disciplines which call forth the full powers of the mind is no less obvious. On the appreciation of art the remark of Sir Joshua Reynolds already quoted<sup>1</sup>—'It is the lowest style only of arts whether of painting, poetry or music that may be said in the vulgar sense to be naturally pleasing'—is as apposite as it is truthful.

*The Difficulty of Great Music.* This statement is perhaps most convincingly verified in music. Again and again one finds that the music that takes one by storm rarely abides, while that which at a first hearing one finds difficult and dull grows in one's affection, the more frequently it is heard. It is, indeed, with music as with women, what attracts us in a woman is rarely what binds us to her. With me this process of easy come, easy go, hard in liking but long in enduring, has been so often repeated, that I have grown unconsciously, as it were, to distrust music that appeals to me too readily, telling myself that no great music ought to be heard, at any rate by me, for the first time. From those of us who are not exceptionally gifted, the appreciation of great music demands humility, patience and faith. One must be humble because there is no reason why the profoundest works of, for example, Beethoven, won by I know not what arduous exploration of regions beyond our unaided reach, should be immediately intelligible to one's inevitably limited faculty of apprehension. If I understood and enjoyed at a first hearing all that Beethoven conceived and conveys, I should have an insight comparable to his. One must be patient because, when immediate enjoyment is lacking, one must be prepared to listen again and again until it comes. One must have faith because, secure in a conviction

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iv, p. 111.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

born of past experience of the worth of the composer, one is enabled through faith to rest content in the assurance that what is beyond one now, and seems boring because it is beyond one, will gradually become meaningful, as the range of one's apprehensions is enlarged by familiarity. Thus the appreciation of great music enlarges the whole self. All these are general and, I am afraid, familiar truths. Circumstances have bestowed upon me an unusual opportunity of verifying them.

*Illustration from Pianola playing.* For thirty years, despairing at an early age of mastering the piano, I have played the pianola and by dint of almost daily practice have become relatively skilled in the manipulation of that despised contrivance, so that I can now make it sound not unlike a piano. In these later years I have been able to arrange for the cutting of the rolls of such pieces of music as I wish to hear, and I have now a fairly complete library of the piano music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. But for many years I had to make such shift as I could with the rolls which were sent to me from a subscription library. I would order a roll containing, let us suppose, a whole suite of Bach, of which I wished to hear one particular movement, a Courante, let us say, or more often a Gigue. In order to reach the chosen movement, which we will suppose to be placed towards the end of the roll, I would have to play through several preliminary movements which were regretted as impediments standing between me and what I wanted to hear, and were played, as it were, under duress. When I had played through them several times, I found that I began to take notice of them, presently even to like them. Finally, they stole into the citadel of my musical consciousness and it was thus that, seeking to hear only the immediately attractive Gigue, I came to love the Allemande and the Sarabande which otherwise I had not known. Since all the movements were, after all, by Bach, the music which made the later and more difficult appeal did not oust that which was more rapidly enjoyed. But—so inscrutable are the ways of pianola roll compilers—one sometimes found on the same roll pieces of music by different composers. Some popular piece not being sufficient in length to fill a normal sized roll was rounded off by another which was not deemed fit to stand, as it were, on its own legs. Lillibulero or the

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

Londonderry Air, for example, might precede a Fantasia by Orlando Gibbons or a Round by Giles Farnaby. I would begin by finding the Fantasia incomprehensible and the Round unnecessarily complex. I ended by looking forward to the Fantasia and the Round and hurrying through my former favourites, the Londonderry Air and Lillibulero, in order the more rapidly to get to them.

If it had not been for the economical vagaries of the pianola roll compilers who had inserted these stray pieces as 'fill ups' at the end of pianola rolls, I would never have mastered—no, 'mastered' is too strong a word—I might never have come to enjoy the English polyphonic music of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

I cite these examples to show how circumstances will sometimes combine to do for a man what he would not have had the resolution, or the patience, or the humility to do for himself, giving him the opportunity to form a taste for first-rate work whose difficulty or strangeness would otherwise have repelled him.

Now, all this would, I suppose, have been taken for granted in other ages, for the truth upon which I am insisting is commonplace enough; but it is far from being familiar to our own and, even if conceded in theory, would in all probability be rejected in practice by a generation which has been taught that the only scale of values by which art may be relevantly judged is that of the pleasure it gives, and has been further led by its education and its politics to believe that pleasure should be easy to come by and that one man's pleasure is as good as another's.

It may well be the case that these 'democratic' standards and modes of approach *are* applicable to the great bulk of human pleasures, but they are emphatically not appropriate to the experiences of the spirit which are evoked by art and literature. The theory and practice of democracy have helped to engender the conviction that there are no pleasures which fall outside the range of the formula for enjoyment to which common men are accustomed and which common men understand.

(v) *That Difficulty of Access enhances Value and that in a Modern Democracy Access is Easy.* An allied point is that for some reason



## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

which it is not easy to fathom, many of us are only prepared to give the full weight of our concentrated attention to the things of the spirit and to derive, therefore, from them the full extent of the benefit which they are capable of bestowing, when these are hard of access. Many may remember Elia's Essay, *Old China*, in which he tells us how much more he and Bridget enjoyed the play when they had to queue for the gallery, brave the rigours of an arduous ascent of the stairs and then sit for a full hour on hard seats surrounded by orange eaters waiting for the play to begin, than when in later affluence they walked at their leisure to their stalls as the curtain went up. Let me cite one or two contemporary illustrations of this truth.

The National Gallery has always been available to Londoners, yet in peace-time comparatively few visited it and those few were mainly tourists or professionals. When the war of 1939-45 came, the pictures were removed to a safe place.

Some time during the war it was decided to bring a few of them back and to run the risk of exhibiting them for short periods at the top of the flight of steps leading out of the entrance hall. Only one or two pictures were exhibited at a time and large numbers of people went to look at them with the result that a more or less permanent crowd obscured the view and one had to wait one's turn in the queue. Speaking from my own experience—it was confirmed, I discovered, by that of many others—I can vouch for the fact that I had never appreciated pictures so much as when, instead of being offered a gallery full of pictures to be visited at leisure and enjoyed in spaciousness, I was confronted with one or two to be viewed hurriedly and uncomfortably as one passed before them in a queue.

I was once in a Monastery where frequent 'retreats' involving long periods of silence were the rule. In a remote room there was a gramophone and a good library of Mozart and Beethoven records. To hear them, however, involved a good deal of planning. One's listening period had to be fitted like a piece in a jig-saw puzzle into the multitudinous activities and observances of the day. There were services to be attended; there were periods of silence to be observed; a long passage leading to the gramophone room could not be used when people were in 'retreat', and

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

so on. In effect, one sneaked up on tiptoe for an occasional half hour carefully planned in advance and cut off sharp at its conclusion even when this meant cutting off a record in the middle. I do not know that I have ever enjoyed music more than in those difficult and precarious half hours.

During the blitz, the College, Birkbeck, to which I belong, decided to give public lunch hour lectures in its theatre. The theatre was twice badly damaged, part of the roof was torn away and there was inadequate protection from the weather. In the bitterly cold winters of the first two years of the war the unheated and unprotected theatre was crowded, as it had never been before, by an eager audience whose appreciation of the cultural goods which were offered to them appeared to grow in proportion to the sacrifices which their enjoyment entailed.

I once lectured as snow filtered through gaps in the roof on to the heads of the audience. . . .

Now, the whole tendency of our age is to make culture accessible to the millions. It is made cheap and easy to come by; it is, therefore, approached in the same spirit as entertainment proper, is judged by entertainment standards and rated low.

## THE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISEMENT AND LACK OF LEISURE

### *(C) The Effects of Advertisement*

These, I think, are both important and harmful. It is not merely that advertisements appeal to those elements which constitute the highest common factors of human nature, to fear and greed and lust and snobbery; more to the point is the fact that they appeal by methods which will be effective with the greatest number. They proceed upon the assumption that the popular taste in art is almost uniformly bad and confirm the taste for which they cater. It is true that large and strongly entrenched concerns enjoying a monopoly or a near monopoly in their own field have from time to time been willing to employ good artists to prepare their advertisements and, by their advertising policy, have kept many artists in being who would otherwise have been forced

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

to take to some other form of employment. But these cases are few, since comparatively few firms can afford the luxury of engaging good artists to do their advertisements, when bad art would be equally if not more effective. This is not because most people actively resent good art; at least, they do not do so when they become used to it, but, as Sir Kenneth Clark has pointed out other things being equal, the majority of people 'probably have a slight bias for what is bad in art, that is to say, in favour of the commonplace'. Bad artistic advertisement is likely, therefore, to be rather more effective than good.

Advertisement bears upon the issue in another way. The purpose of advertisers is to sell commodities. Now, the man who lives the life of the mind and enjoys on occasion the experiences of the spirit is a bad consumer of commodities. While others are driving in cars, crowding into cinemas or filing through clicking turnstiles, drinking or playing games or looking at shows and spectacles, he is reading an inexpensively priced Penguin or a Pelican, sitting in a cheap seat at a concert or tramping, which, apart from the wear and tear of leather soles and an occasional pint of beer, costs very little; in extreme cases he is content with a green thought in a green shade, which costs nothing at all; or he is attending meetings or engaging in discussion. . . . The 'intellectual' is, in short, in all his forms a bad consumer. He makes less than the average demand upon the productive capacity of a community which under normal conditions is habitually at its wits' end to know how to get rid of its surplus goods. Hence, from the advertiser's point of view, the 'intellectual' is a 'sales resister'. It is inevitable in the circumstances that the whole apparatus of commercial production, more particularly in its impact upon the public in the form of advertisement, should be designed to discourage 'intellectuals'. Their tastes are derided, their pursuits mocked, while they themselves are pilloried by such epithets as 'brainy' and such appellations as 'high-brow'. Thus, a tendency to prefer Bach to jazz, a cheap classical reprint to a recently published novel, an exhibition of pictures to a movie show and a walking tour to a Butlin Camp is discouraged, and those who exhibit it become the objects of social disapproval.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

### *(D) The Effects of Lack of Leisure*

These are familiar and need not here be developed at length. The appreciation of great art demands time, a quiet mind and a comparatively stationary body. All these are increasingly denied by our civilization.

As to time, we have invented so many devices for saving it that there has never been a generation with so little time to spare. Our minds are unquiet because of the hurry of our lives. We are too busy thinking to stop and think, too busy talking to stop and listen and too busy moving to stop and look.

The continual movement of our bodies is, I think, a factor whose importance is insufficiently realized. Almost all the producers of great art and great thought have by our standards been practically stationary. Socrates never left Greece and rarely Athens, Vermeer hardly ever left Delft, or Kant Koenigsberg; Leonardo was almost exclusively in northern Italy. For nearly thirty years, the most creative period of his genius, Bach was permanently at Leipsic. Schubert spent nearly the whole of his life in the environs of Vienna. For all but three years of his life Wordsworth remained in Westmorland. The poet, Gray, stayed at Cambridge, Dr. Johnson lay close in London, Constable rarely left Suffolk, Renoir gravitated between Paris and Rome, and so on. The connection between what I have called the stationariness of the body and the profounder activities of the spirit is, I think, obvious. The pool cannot reflect the sky if it is stirred; constant movement of the body stirs it. This is particularly true of movement in a car, where the activities of reading, writing, thinking, meditating, observing, appreciating, are all more or less inhibited. What is true of motoring, is still truer of flying.

Our generation spends a far greater proportion of its time in movement in general and in rapid movement in particular than any of its predecessors. It is rarely still. Rarely, then, do the conditions exist in which the profounder activities of the mind can be exercised or the higher ranges of the spirit explored.

A subsidiary point is that the activities of the intellect are heightened when a number are engaged on the co-operative

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

solution of a common problem, just as the goods of the spirit are more keenly enjoyed in company.<sup>1</sup> For example, reading aloud to an appreciative and like-minded group tends to increase one's pleasure in great literature. But people are rarely sufficiently undisturbed, or sufficiently often in one another's company, to form such a group, with the result that the art of reading aloud which the Victorians cultivated has largely been lost.

Summing up, we may say that the influences of our time which are largely hostile to the stationariness of the body are hostile also to the quietude of the mind. It follows that it is only rarely that the physical conditions for the appreciation of great literature, profound thought and difficult art are satisfied. Since men must read and hear and see, there springs up a crop of superficial books, cheap music and vulgar pictures to satisfy their needs. These do not seriously challenge the mind, engage the attention, refine the senses, or elevate the spirit, and, since the appetite grows with what it feeds on, the appetite for bad no less than that for good, the public taste is debased.

### *Conclusion*

It is time to bring these observations to their point and conclusion. My subject matter in this chapter has been part general, part particular. The general part has been the intellectual interests and spiritual life of the great bulk of human beings who have ever lived. I have noted that they have not in any age shown any marked disposition to enjoy the fruits of the spirit or to explore the higher ranges of the intellect. Yet it may well be that the reasons why the minds and the spirits of the great mass of mankind have always been largely unexercised is that they have been unprovided for. Mentally and spiritually they have been under-stimulated. The particular part relates to the intellectual and spiritual interests of the great bulk of the men and women who live in a modern democracy. For the first time in history deliberate provision has been made for the masses in the sense that a vast industry exists to cater for their tastes, by the movies, by the dance band, by the radio, by the popular press and the cheap novel. Now, to cater

<sup>1</sup> See for a development of this theme chapter iii, pp. 85-93.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

for is also to determine; for the appetite grows with what it feeds on and what is bad infects and corrupts, just as what is good elevates and refines. Hence, the taste of the mass of mankind, being actively perverted and deliberately debauched, is probably worse today than it has ever been.

It is debauched not by depravity but by silliness and triviality. Hence, to revert to the terminology which I have employed in the preceding chapters, the masses are not merely not introduced to true 'objects', they are provided with false ones. It is not the true, the good and the beautiful with which they make contact but with their fake representations and false similitudes. A man who is ignorant and crude, because no provision is made for the satisfaction of his intellect and the refinement of his spirit, may learn to appreciate what is good when such provision ultimately comes his way. But a man whose vision has been blinded by hindrances will, until the hindrances have been removed, be unable to recognize what is good when he sees it. His condition is, therefore, the worse. What bearing has this conclusion on the question of decadence?

### *Return to the theme of Decadence*

A non-decadent community is, I have suggested, one which is conscious of the spiritual order of the universe, more particularly as it manifests itself in values. Inhabitants of this order are God and the values in which God expresses and manifests Himself, namely, truth, goodness and beauty. Characteristic human responses to value are religion and morals, scholarship and learning, science and philosophy and the production and enjoyment of works of art. All these are interpreted by members of a non-decadent society in terms of the confrontation of the human mind by something other, which I have called 'the object'. In decadent societies 'the object' is lost sight of. The consequences of the dropping of 'the object' are different in the intelligentsia and in the masses. In the intelligentsia there is a concentration upon personal experience and a tendency to derive the values of art or morals and of truth from personal experience. This tendency I hope to illustrate in the next chapter.

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

In the masses, with the possible exception of religion, there has not at any time been a vivid awareness of 'the object'. Religion has largely lost its hold and I have accordingly turned to a consideration of the popular attitude to art, since in an irreligious age art is the avenue through which the spirit of man is chiefly reached and it is by works of art that it is chiefly moved. Art is not a substitute for religion but it has in the past been closely linked with it. I do not merely mean by this that religion has inspired great works of art, the cathedrals of the Middle Ages, the devotional prose of Cranmer's prayer book, Pascal's *Pensées*, the pictures of Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca and Mantegna, the music of Palestrina and of Bach. I mean further that there is an element of awe and reverence for the non-human which is common to and characteristic both of the saint and of the artist.

When religion loses its hold, it ceases to be an inspiration to artists who no longer feel reverence for the non-human. It may be doubted whether much contemporary art receives its inspiration from religion; thus, the decline of religion impoverishes art by withdrawing one of its sources of supply. Art also shares with religion the characteristic of being a non-utilitarian, non-measurable value.

\* I have sought, then, to assess the popular attitude to art in our times. The appreciation of art by the great mass of people in previous ages has been non-existent or faint. But there have been no forces in existence actively to discourage such appreciation. In our own there are, I suggest, certain factors which are definitely hostile to it. I have tried to enumerate some of these factors; if I am right a perverted substitute for art is taking the place of art proper and is likely to do so increasingly, since just as the taste and demand for what is good grow with opportunities for their exercise and satisfaction, so, too, do the taste and demand for what is bad. It is, I think, not impossible that the capacity for apprehending value, at least in its form of manifestation as beauty, may gradually be lost. Our children or our children's children may become poor in spirit, that is to say, they may lose the capacity for spiritual experience, and function only at the level of the senses, the emotions and intellect. Aldous Huxley has drawn a picture of human beings so impoverished in his *Brave New*

## THE CULTURE OF THE MANY

*World.* Humanity having become increasingly dependent upon machines for its sustenance, the satisfaction of its wants and the provision of its pleasures may, on this supposition, relapse to a lower level of consciousness in which the awareness of value is lost. There are examples in biology of regressive species, and Samuel Butler's myth of the machines as the next level of evolutionary development supplanting and enslaving the human beings who evolved them may enshrine an important truth, or, less pessimistically, may embody at least one of the significant possibilities which the future holds in store. Or we may come to resemble more closely the societies of insects, functioning with an efficiency ever more complete on the planes on to which we have subsided, but losing all contact with the spiritual order of which we now have a precarious and intermittent hold.<sup>1</sup> If this should prove to be the case, humanity will be seen in retrospect to have been a comparatively brief interlude in life's evolution from the brute to the insect. Now whatever meaning we give to the word 'decadent', few of us would, I think, wish to withhold its application from a society which prepared the way for this development or even advanced a step in this direction.

<sup>1</sup>I have examined this possibility in some detail in chapter xv.



## CHAPTER XII

# The Literary Culture of Our Time

### 1. THE SHORT STORY

I turn to literature, not to poetry, since I have not the knowledge or the taste to enable me to write of that, nor to the novel, since that were to embark upon too large a subject demanding too extended a treatment for what is after all only the illustration of a thesis, but to the short story, as affording a convenient starting-point for enquiry. When I was a young man, there was a number of good short story writers; Wells was at the top of his talent and so were Kipling, Conrad and Galsworthy; de Maupassant was still fashionable; most of Hardy's short stories had been written in the early years of the century but they were still eagerly read by my generation. As for Meredith, we considered *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper* and *The Story of Bhanavar the Beautiful* to be works of genius, the first among the most diverting, the second among the loveliest things in English fiction. I developed a line of my own in ghost stories. Everybody seemed to know *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Monkey's Paw*, *The End of the Passage* and *The Mark of the Beast*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and M. R. James's *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, but I made it my business to track down ghost stories that seemed to be not less good but only less known. Thus, I made the acquaintance of W. W. Jacobs' *The Well* and *In the Library*, of some odd things by Jerome K. Jerome and of Algernon Blackwood's *The Willows*. But this is not intended to be a list and I pull myself up with the repeated assertion that the world in which I grew up was rich in good short stories and of the most varied kind, ranging from Henry James's *Madame de Mauves* to Dostoïevski's *The Husband of Akoulka* and from Max's

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

*The Happy Hypocrite* to W. H. Hudson's *Marta Requieme*. In those days the criterion of what was good and bad in literature was still thought a suitable topic for discussion, and there was an abundance of talk and writing on the function of the short story. What, we wanted to know, was its *raison d'être*? Wherein lay its characteristic excellence? What should it seek to achieve? Wells, I remember—and I do not know that he ever did anything better than those early short stories of his—was for looseness of form and abundance of experiment, defining his conception of the art of the short story 'as the jolly art of making something very bright and moving; it may be horrible, or pathetic, or funny, or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential, that it should take from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud'. 'I refuse,' he added, 'altogether to recognize any hard and fast type for the short story.'

### *Statement of Principles*

'Something very bright and moving', no doubt. But how was this to be achieved? The first part of this book diagnosed as the characteristic defect of contemporary art and thought what I have called the 'dropping of the object'<sup>1</sup> and as a consequence an interest in and a value for experience for its own sake. If I am right in thinking that experience for its own sake is not an adequate end, then some experiences are, it is obvious, to be preferred to others. Which experiences are among those to be selected as the stuff of literature? Those, I suppose, that are for any reason significant, the business of pure fiction being to throw these into high relief, stripping them of the irrelevances that obscure them in life, so that we may view them clearly and perceive their significance. But in a short story it is not so much the significance of life as of a *point* of life that is presented. That is it;

<sup>1</sup>The word 'object' is, of course, extremely ambiguous, nowhere more so than in connection with the subject matter of this chapter, since what I am here taking to be the 'object', that is, what a story is *about*, is usually called the 'subject', just as the apples on a plate that Cézanne painted are called his 'subject'. I defend myself with the reflection that I had need of a single all-embracing word and the observation that the sense in which this particular phrase, the 'object', is used is frequently described in Part I, more particularly in chapter iv, pp. 131-7.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

a short story must have a point. It must not be content to photograph life; it must heighten life and bring it to a point, just as a Dutch interior by Vermeer or de Hooch does not photograph the room, though at first sight that is all that it may seem to do, but conveys its essential quality, the Form, as Plato would put it, that underlies or is manifested in it, so that the room in the picture conveys more of the essential being and nature of the thing presented than the room which the architect and upholsterer made and the people lived in. Now, to have a point, the short story must have a climax as well as a beginning and an end. It must, then, in the first place, be a complete whole, so that, having read it, we have the same feeling of having enjoyed a timeless experience as is evoked in us by any contact with works of art which, if I am right,<sup>1</sup> derive their significance from a timeless world. 'The short story', says Somerset Maugham—and he is, perhaps, the only short story writer at the highest level still producing, so that his views are entitled to have weight—'should have completeness, so that when it is finally unfolded no more questions can be asked about the characters who took part in it.'

But, secondly, since a story consists of words, and words have meaning, the story must, I suppose—I do not like saying this, but I do not know how else to express myself—have a moral, in the sense that it must convey some comment either explicitly or by implication upon life, in the sense in which Galsworthy's story, *The Stoic*, conveys an obvious comment upon life, or as the moral of *The Turn of the Screw* turns upon whether the 'you' in 'Peter Quint—you devill' (little Miles's last saying) refers to the governess or to Quint.

Now that the story may be an artistic whole and that it may convey a moral, it must be *about* something and that it may be about something it must have not only a beginning, an end and a climax, but also a plot. The something that the story is about performs in the case of the short story the office which throughout Part I I have appropriated for 'the object'; the plot is a trap to catch, a medium to precipitate the 'something' and the moral emerges by implication. To put this in another way, form is essential to any work of art, form being a device for canalizing the

<sup>1</sup>See chapter viii, pp. 182, 183.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

expressions of the human spirit and preventing them from dissipating themselves. Nietzsche puts this very well. 'The singular fact,' he says, 'remains, however, that everything of the nature of freedom, elegance, boldness, dance, and masterly certainty, which exists or has existed, whether it be in thought itself or in administration, or in speaking and persuading, in art just as in conduct, has only developed by means of the tyranny of arbitrary law. The essential thing,' he goes on, '“in heaven and earth” is, apparently (to repeat it once more), that there should be long *obedience* in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living; for instance, virtue, art, music, dancing, reason, spirituality.' In the short story, the form is the plot with its beginning, end and climax. The plot pins down and presents a piece of life within the confines of its own construction; in so doing, it exhibits life to us, as it were under a microscope, and enables us to view it more clearly than we can view it in the raw. In his book, *The Summing Up*, Somerset Maugham makes the same point.

'The chief use of a plot,' he wrote, 'is one that many people do not seem to have noticed. It is a line to direct the reader's interest. This is possibly the most important thing in fiction.' When life is confined within the boundaries of the plot and thus viewed in concentrated form by the reader, it is found to convey something that the writer thinks important and wishes to convey to his reader; in short, it conveys a moral.

### *The Slippery Slope*

In the years immediately prior to 1914 a movement began which after the first world war gathered such momentum that to a large extent it succeeded in obscuring the obvious principles which I have just suggested. This may be called the 'Slice of Life' movement. Chekov began it. Chekov was a creator of atmosphere, a very wonderful and intricate atmosphere compounded of Russian melancholy, Russian mysticism, Russian fecklessness, Russian despair, futility, and infirmity of purpose, through which the characters move their listless bodies, heave their saddened sighs

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

and conduct their fruitless intrigues. Chekov was so good at this sort of thing that when speaking of him many did not hesitate to use the word 'genius'. At any rate he began to exercise a great influence upon English writers, so that it presently came to be an unspoken article of faith that everybody who wrote short stories must treat them more or less like Chekov. Unfortunately Chekov had certain obvious limitations. Somerset Maugham summarizes them as follows: 'He had no gift for devising a compact dramatic story, such a story as you could tell with effect over the dinner table like *L'Heritage* or *La Parure*. As a man, he seems to have been of a cheerful and practical disposition, but as a writer he was of a depressed melancholic nature that made him turn away with distaste from violent action or exuberance.' Chekov had the skill to make his limitations the basis of his art but his imitators—and soon they were legion—regarded the limitations as virtues. Chekov could not tell a story; story telling, then, must be unnecessary and they would not tell one even if they could. Chekov could not construct a plot; so the difficulties of plot construction need not be attempted and happenings could be put down higgledy piggledy just as they occurred to the writer; precisely, in fact, as they occur in life. As Virginia Woolf put it, the business of the fiction writer is to 'record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall . . . to trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.'

The influence of Chekov is strongly marked in the work of Katherine Mansfield, who appropriated many of his characteristics and applied them to the art of short story writing in English. Katherine Mansfield was a writer of great talent; she could be very pathetic, as in *Life of Ma Parker* or *The Daughters of the Colonel*, and some of her pieces conform to Wells's definition of the short story as 'the jolly art of making something very bright and moving'. But, like Chekov, Katherine Mansfield was almost entirely devoid of the gift of construction; moreover, she had nothing very much to say. Lacking the power of construction, she made the most of her deficiency and presented us with slices of life in the raw which were applauded for their realism.

---

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

I can conceive her rationalizing her deficiencies very much as follows: 'I cannot invent anything very striking; so I will content myself with describing. There is nothing very much that I have to contribute in the way of personal comment upon life and how it should be lived, so I will confine myself to presenting it precisely as it *is* lived, and if the result is to produce what is a photograph rather than a picture, there will always be many to maintain that a photograph is the higher form of art. After all, persons do matter and their experiences are worth recording, just because they happen to persons; therefore, I will present slices of experience.' From these sources there flowed a stream of stories whose purpose was simply to present a piece or slice of life. No attempt whatever was made to cook the pieces; to pass them through the alembic of the writer's personality and so transform them in the process; to polish them, to round them off, to comment upon them or to draw morals from them. They were served up raw, just as they were supposed to have occurred. Writers have been serving them up ever since, and if the results have made up in gloom what they have lacked in point, this, after all, was only to be expected according to the literary canon laid down by the tranter, Reuben Dewy, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*: 'My sonnies, all true stories have a coarse touch, or a bad moral, depend upon't. If the story tellers could ha' got decency and good morals from true stories, who'd have troubled to invent parables?'

### *Short Stories in 'Horizon'*

In the course of writing this chapter, I have read a number of short stories which have appeared in recent years in periodicals devoted to the furtherance of literature—in *Horizon*, for example, or the revived *Cornhill* or in *New Writing*. Familiarity dulls the point of astonishment and I ought by now, I suppose, to be able to take them for granted. Yet I still confess to a feeling of mild surprise that such things should be written or, if written, published. For, indeed, they are just like life. Nothing in life, we are often told, ever begins; and these stories don't begin; nothing in life ever artistically ends; and these stories don't artistically end; they just stop, stop with the same pointless abruptness as they

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

began, so that presently you find yourself asking why they should ever have been begun or why, having been begun, they should ever have ended. Nothing in life, we are also told, is formed, shaped, wholly relevant or conformable to rule; and nothing about these stories is relevant or conformable to rule. Instead of form, shape, rule and order we are presented with an introspective account of the flow of thought, feeling and impulse which at times in its lack of regard for logical order, historical sequence or even rational meaning approximates to the free association praised and employed by analysts. Let me give one or two examples beginning with the best. Here, then, is a story by Elizabeth Bowen, a very good and much admired writer, which appeared in the issue of *Horizon*, for September 1945. After its own fashion and granted the limitations which it accepts, this is an extremely good story. It is called *Ivy Gripped the Steps* and it continues for some thirty pages, occupying roughly as much space as all the other contributions to the journal put together. The story is about a little boy who goes to stay with a friend of his mother, Mrs. Nicolson, at a place called Southstone. Mrs. Nicolson causes the boy to love her; some would say that she exploits his affection, because it is a law of her nature that she must excite affection and admiration in someone. Her would-be lover, Admiral Concannon, does say so. The story turns upon what the little boy may or may not have noticed in the emotional situation which arises between Mrs. Nicolson and Admiral Concannon. Perhaps an unspoken implication is that the little boy's love for the lady has made him incapable of a satisfactory love for another woman when he grows up; but whether this is, in fact, the moral, I don't pretend to know.

The story consists for the most part of incidents such as the following. Mrs. Nicolson drops her muff on the sofa; the little boy strokes it and says that it is like a cat.

“‘Shall I have a cat?’ Mrs. Nicolson asks. ‘Would you like me to have a cat?’”

Then without any transition of thought or meaning there occurs the sentence, ‘All the other rooms as they went upstairs were tawny with fires that did not smoke.’ There is no further reference to the cat motif. The story is largely composed of such disconnected sayings and observations.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

Do they, one asks oneself, help forward the telling of the tale? They do not. Do they elucidate a plot? No, for there is no plot. Do they throw light upon the development of character? Answer again, no. Are they linked together in any logical or artistic or significant way? They are not. They are linked only by succession in time. Each, so far as I can see, is logically and artistically irrelevant to the others. They are threads woven into no pattern; little hard chunks of insignificant fact flung at the reader presumably on the assumption that all experience is in some sense significant.

Here is another story by Denton Welch from the July 1945 issue of the revived *Cornhill*. It is called *Narcissus Bay* and begins by describing how, as a child in China, the author one day saw a procession of two men guarding two prisoners with their hands tied behind their backs and ropes round their necks, followed by a woman whose lips were bruised and swollen and whose scalp was bleeding from a number of cuts. The prisoners file past and disappear. The child then goes to a beach where he plays with two girls older than himself. He tells them about the prisoners. They cheek their governess and run off to try and get a sight of them. He then goes to tea with a boy friend and his mother. He tells the friend about the prisoners. The friend is excited and would like to have seen them, too. The two boys then make fun of and do their best to frighten a younger boy who is staying in the house. The boy who tells the story then bathes, triumphing over his friend who is not allowed to bathe. Finally, going home at night, he thinks of the prisoners and of a shrine on the mountain above the point at which he saw them where he had once 'eaten a picnic' and 'picked out little rock plants'. And that is all—really all. One comes to the end with a feeling of surprised frustration. Presently irritation supervenes. Surely, one says to oneself, it cannot really be as simple and as silly as that? It must *mean* something. And since no meaning appears on the surface, it must lie below it. There must be some deeper sense, some hidden meaning which one has missed. Perhaps the story is symbolic; the symbolism, one thinks, is probably sexual, a supposition to which the title *Narcissus Bay* lends countenance.



## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

### *On Symbolism*

I am not sympathetic to symbolism. Symbolism I take to be a form of expression according to which the writer who is really thinking of B writes about A instead, A being intended to show forth, hint at or otherwise indicate B. You read, as it were, between A's lines and you discover B.

This method of procedure seems to me to be open to the objection that either the writer knows what B is, so that he could tell us about it if he wanted to, or he does not. If he does, why not tell us about it directly, instead of interposing A and then challenging us to divine what he wants to say about B from our acquaintance with A? If he does not, how can he know whether A stands for and shows forth B, or whether it stands for and shows forth something else, or stands for and shows forth anything at all? More to the point, how can he expect the reader, who cannot reasonably be asked to divine meanings hidden from the author, to know for him? I am, of course, aware that this logical dilemma is not wholly apposite; that its two sharp alternatives, either this or that, constitute too crude a pair of forceps with which to grasp the impalpable meanings that literature can and should seek to convey; that there are more things in heaven and earth than can be impaled upon the horns of a dilemma and that some of those which are unamenable to direct, straightforward description can, nevertheless, be conveyed through the medium of allegory and parable, of symbol and myth. I understand that it is one of the main functions of poetry so to convey them.

Nevertheless, I am suspicious of symbolism; it seems to me to be often used as a device, not so much for conveying something that cannot otherwise be communicated, as for disguising the fact that there is nothing to communicate, and I am—let me confess it—temperamentally obtuse and unappreciative even when it is legitimately and appropriately used.

And so, remembering this temperamental deficiency of mine, I read the story again, looking carefully for any hidden meaning which it might carry, something lurking below the surface of the story to which it sought to draw the reader's attention, reminding myself that in reading Kafka, for example, I have

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

sensed this 'something' and even made shift to understand it. So I read Mr. Welch's story again—and, though I dwell on it here, I do so, I venture to repeat, only for the sake of illustration; I could make the same complaint of scores of contemporary short stories—and I was still unable to see why the story should have been written. It told no tale; it conveyed no moral; it was not intrinsically moving or significant, and it was about nothing at all. It is not easy to write about nothing at all. Even Lady Bertram could not manage it, 'for though' she 'rather shone in the epistolary line . . . and formed for herself a very creditable, commonplace, amplifying style, so that a very little matter was enough for her, she could not do without any; she must have something to write about, even to her niece'. But Mr. Welch and his like achieve the feat which baffled Lady Bertram. Now this feat, I suggest, could only have seemed worth while attempting, it could certainly only have been brought off, granted the tacit assumption, which in earlier chapters I have sought to identify with the common factor of many forms of decadence, the assumption, namely, that any experience is significant and worthy of record, irrespective of the quality of the experience or the nature of the 'object' of which it is an experience.

### *Concentration on the Abnormal*

And yet, as a general description of the characteristics of the modern short story this is not quite fair, for there is after all a tendency to select some kinds of experience as being more significant than other kinds, and to concentrate upon them for that reason. These are the experiences of half-wits, psychologically abnormal persons and children. If the child happens to be psychologically abnormal, two birds are, as it were, killed with the stone of a single story and a high proportion of contemporary stories written by cultivated persons for cultivated persons deal with such cases. (The word 'case' inevitably suggests itself.) In fact, the refinement of the writer and the elevation of the publication are so regularly proportional to the primitiveness of the subject, that you would be almost justified in supposing that the proper study of intelligent mankind is unintelligent man.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

Just as stories in popular magazines for young girls choose high life or film-star life for their themes, so magazines written for educated and intellectual persons concentrate on low life, where simple or doubtful characters give utterance to their obvious or dubious thoughts in abruptly ungrammatical sentences of half a dozen monosyllables. If the monosyllables are in dialect or slang, so that many cultivated readers are unable to understand them, so much the better. Now primitives, drunks, idiots and children are all below the average level of adult sanity and intelligence. For my part, I find them dull, believing, as I do, that interest is on the whole to be found at the same level of development as that which I have reached myself and that enlightenment and improvement come from a higher level. It is, then, to persons who are superior to myself in respect of knowledge and understanding of and insight into human nature, whose conduct is more righteous, or, at least, more various than my own, that I wish to be introduced; not to those who exist and act at levels which I have passed beyond and left behind. In a word, I want my thoughts to be elevated and enlarged and my feelings stimulated and refined.

This may be a merely personal taste which I should not wish to erect into a canon of judgement.

It is none the less a not unreasonable claim that where in a society the most intellectual and sensitive writers, being no longer interested in the higher manifestations of the human spirit in art, music, poetry, religion and thought, direct their attention to the primitive and the elementary, the fact should be taken as a symptom of that society's decadence. It is as though it had grown tired of the weight of a culture which it could no longer sustain and hurried, therefore, to divest itself of the burden by an exclusive preoccupation with humanity at the precultural level. This deliberate putting back of the clock of civilization is a phenomenon sufficiently well-attested in the political sphere. It is, indeed, one of the distinctive marks of Fascism and Nazism. It expresses itself in the burning of books which fools have difficulty in understanding because they are profound and the suppression of thoughts which reactionaries find disturbing because they are novel. It is a symptom of weariness and impatience. The

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

preoccupation with the primitive in sculpture, in music, in the novels of Hemingway's imitators and in the paintings of Dali, and the prevailing cult of the drunken, the childish and the idiotic in the short story, are manifestations of the same tendency in the cultural sphere.

### *Alleged Significance of the Experience of Children. Summary of a Story*

Let me try to illustrate this generalization. It so happens that both the stories to which I have referred are concerned with the experiences of children. I did not select them for that reason, but because they illustrated what may be called the 'Slice of Life' doctrine. Yet the fact that they both *are* concerned with the experiences of children is not a coincidence. I estimate that of any hundred stories published in the last ten years in magazines catering for educated and intelligent persons, fifty will be found to be about children. Thus, when I look for stories which are typical of the contemporary interest in and concentration upon the primitive, on the assumption that the experience of undeveloped persons possesses some special significance, it is in the nature of the case to be expected that another story about a child should present itself.

I take it from *Horizon* for December 1944; it is by T. C. Worsley and is called 'The Sacred Table'. A woman, Mrs. Moroney, sends for a young man to act as tutor to her son who keeps running away from school. Nobody knows why he does this since at first he did well at school and enjoyed it; it was only later that he began to run away. At home he is apathetic and listless and shows no interest in anything. Mrs. Moroney wants the tutor to cure him. Mrs. Moroney is artistic and believes in the importance of beauty. Her own 'special' room contains a valuable and much admired table. She had introduced the boy to 'higher things', the things of the mind and spirit, 'music, books, stuff, everything', before he went to school; in particular, to dancing, to which he became passionately addicted. Now, however, he refuses to dance.

The tutor takes on the job on the understanding that he is to

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

be given a free hand. This is conceded. He asks the boy a direct question, 'Why *did* you run away?' He also feels disposed to ask—it is not clear whether he does ask—'What do you think of your mother?' because he suspects the mother of being the dominating influence in the boy's life and so connected in some way with the running away and the psychological apathy. He gets no satisfactory response. The boy exhibits his first flash of interest on hearing an account in a chorus by Pindar of young men dancing. The second is aroused by the sight of the tutor's muscles as the boy watches him undressing for a bath. With the first sign of the boy's returning interest in life Mrs. Moroney begins to watch the pair. The next event is cricket practice at which the boy bowls well and fast. He enjoys himself but grows listless again when he discovers that his mother is watching. Next time they play cricket he hurls the ball at the tutor's head. Mrs. Moroney is angry. She admits that the boy is 'coming alive' but says that he is now a barbarian. She interferes more and more and the boy clearly dislikes the interference. Next the tutor finds the boy torturing a cat with a lighted cigarette end. When detected the boy first struggles and then sags listlessly. There is a suggestion that the tutor himself shares in the boy's feeling of guilt. After dinner Mrs. Moroney plays the piano; the boy, after showing marked distaste for his mother, goes out and is later found dancing in steel-tipped shoes on the valued table; the table is shattered and the tutor dismissed.

### *Comment on the Summary*

I am well aware that to summarize a story in this bald fashion is to do it gross injustice; that any story, however good, can be made to sound foolish or pointless by an ingeniously selected *précis*; and that any *précis* is bound to be a travesty. I defend this one on two grounds. First, it was necessary; I wanted to cite a typical short story and comment on it. Now, clearly the comment would be meaningless unless the reader was told, however briefly, what the story was about. It seemed to me unlikely that many of my readers would have read the story. Or, indeed, any other contemporary short story. . . .

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

For here one glimpses another aspect of the cultural confusion of our time. There is little informed discussion and criticism of books, precisely because there are few books or reviews which one can count on everybody having read. This situation is novel.

### *Absence of a Common Background*

In the nineteenth century there was at any given moment a number of standard authors, from whom every new book was bought and read by those who aspired to literary taste. Even when I was growing up in the years before 1914, there were half a dozen or more authors, Shaw, Wells, Kipling, Bennett, Galsworthy, Chesterton, Belloc, whose plays and books were discussed as they came out, because one could usually count upon some at least of the people one met having read them; or, at least, on their wish to be thought to have read them, and so upon their thinking it worth while to simulate the knowledge that they did not possess. Receding below the literary horizon, Hardy and Meredith were still writing, nor would it have been necessary to summarize a work by either of these writers before commenting on it.

But today there are very few writers, if any, in that position. We used all of us to read E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, but the former, alas, has ceased to write fiction and the latter will write no more.

Somerset Maugham alone among contemporary writers occupies the same sort of position as some of the great Victorians did in the nineteenth century, or as Bennett and Wells in the early years of this century. I suppose that Hemingway and Koestler may be regarded as established novelists and many would make an equivalent claim for Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. But there are not many—I doubt if there are *any*—others in a similar position. As a result there is among us no common ground of literary discussion and before one can refer to a fictional work which one wishes to cite because it typifies tendencies, one must tell one's readers what the story is about.

Secondly, the *précis* does not do the story any serious injustice, for little happens that is not included in the *précis*. In other words, the story easily lends itself to summary. As a record of

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

happenings which commends itself to our interest because of the intrinsic interest of the happenings recorded, it makes no claims upon our attention. Nor is there attraction in the characters, still less development of the characters. Neither the mother nor the tutor is sufficiently interesting for the reader to feel any very great concern about them one way or the other; frankly, we don't very much mind what happens to them. The boy? The boy, of course, is more interesting and it is, I take it, in his development, and more particularly in the development of his relation with his mother, that the point of the story lies. And here, I suppose, one must avow one's suspicion that the meaning of the story may not lie wholly on the surface.

As I have already confessed, I am not good at divining hidden meanings but this one I take to be roughly as follows: the boy resents his mother, or, alternatively, passionately loves her; therefore he is frustrated or, alternatively, jealous, and his feeling whether of resentment or jealousy expresses itself in or turns itself into hatred. Because of this hatred, he wants to do violence to his mother. His desire to hurt having been driven underground, he becomes apathetic and listless. Presently, it finds its first outlet in hurling a cricket ball at the tutor; later, a second one in torturing the cat; finally, it satisfies itself by breaking up the table which, being his mother's most cherished possession, stands to him for her. Why he kept running away from school, I am unable to say. Nor can I see why he rejoices in the tutor's strength, and though I can easily believe that he likes dancing, I don't see much relevance in this fact to what I take to be the theme of the story. He might just as well have enjoyed catching butterflies. But, of course, I may be quite wrong in supposing that this is, in truth, the hidden meaning of the story. That children hate mothers who dominate them and will take it out of them whenever they get the chance, is a fact neither very interesting nor very remarkable. It is certainly not new; nor did we have to wait for psychoanalysts to invent a special phraseology of 'transference', to recognize that feelings of anger against a living human being may well be visited upon an inanimate body owned or loved by that human being. Angry children have always kicked the paint off the doors of the rooms in which they have been locked up.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

But why dwell upon these commonplace facts? Why, if I may venture the colloquialism, 'make such a song and dance' about them?

But here, I see, I must guard myself against misapprehension. I do not wish to suggest that commonplace incidents are *not* suitable material for literature. Nobody of my generation who has been brought up to admire the great realist writers of the early twentieth century, Bennett, for example, or Wells, or George Moore, could possibly fall into so vulgar an error. All that I wish to assert is that the mere recording and stringing together of such incidents do not constitute literature. They are the flesh and blood with which to clothe the bones of a plot, or cues for the evocation and delineation of character. But in themselves they are no more literature than a photograph of a room of homely objects is a picture by a Dutch master.

### *Return to the Theme of Decadence*

Now, in the Worsley story there is no plot. There is, I grant, a certain exposition of character, in the sense that we know more about the boy at the end than we did at the beginning. But the characters are so dim, the situation so ordinary, the psychology so commonplace that we may well ask whether the exposition was worth attempting. The answer, I think, is 'No', except on two assumptions, the assumption, first, that you consider all experience of any kind to be significant, and the assumption, secondly, that you think some experiences, namely, those of children, neurotics and perverts to be more significant than other experiences and those of neurotic children to be most significant of all.

These I have already noted as assumptions characteristic of decadence, for the reason that it is only a generation which (a) acknowledges no compelling creed, (b) lacks the creative ability to invent a good story, (c) makes no discrimination between experiences precisely because, for it, all experiences are more or less significant are, indeed, according to extreme versions of the view all *equally* significant, and (d) is therefore forced, when it wants to give a special savour to experience, to look in the direction of the primitive and the perverted—it is only, I say, a



## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

generation which consciously acknowledges these beliefs or unconsciously proceeds on these assumptions, which could find in stories of the type to which those I have summarized belong, its appropriate form of expression.

It will be obvious that characteristics (a), (b) and, by implication, (c) all constitute illustrations of what in the earlier part of this book I have called the 'dropping of the object'.

## 2. LITERARY CRITICISM

I venture to amplify this brief sketch of tendencies in contemporary literature by a glance at contemporary criticism. My sole purpose being to illustrate a thesis, I cannot, it is obvious, enter, except in the most cursory manner, the vast field here presented. I must, therefore, select. My selection is governed by two conditions: (i) the criticism selected must be typical of a general tendency, though it may be an extreme example of it; (ii) it must illustrate the thesis which runs throughout this book, namely, the significance of what I have called the 'dropping of the object'. My selection does not, of course, mean that there is not a great body of literary criticism which conforms to *neither* of these conditions.

### *Review by Anna Kavan of 'Time Must Have a Stop'*

The criticism which I have selected as fulfilling them is a review by Anna Kavan, which appeared in the July 1945 number of *Horizon*, of Aldous Huxley's novel, *Time Must Have a Stop*. *Time Must Have a Stop* contains a number of themes, but the most important is the clash between the unabashed though refined Epicureanism of Eustace Barnack and the mystical view of human life and its status in the universe expounded by Bruno Rontini, the Italian bookseller. The two doctrines are presented in their most extreme forms. Barnack seeks to make the best of this world by cultivating his senses and refuses to consider whether there is any order of being other than that of which his senses make him aware. Bruno contends:

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

- (i) that this order of reality is not the only order;
- (ii) that it is not the most important order;
- (iii) that there is another order, that of the spirit, with which we can make contact as 'object' but which is also present within us as 'subject' and which constitutes our true self, and
- (iv) that preoccupation with the life of the senses dulls the spirit and makes it incapable of apprehending the things belonging to the spirit which are its appropriate concern.

There is, further, a suggestion that if, while we are still in the body, we follow a certain way of life we shall at death become merged wholly and completely in pure spirit; if not, not. The author clearly identifies himself with the second of these two doctrines. Barnack meets a squalid death from over-eating and over-drinking, survives as a spirit, but consistently refuses to merge his individuality in the welcoming and all-embracing oneness of spiritual reality and seeks to maintain an unsatisfying contact with the sensory world which he has left through temporary incarnation in the body of a medium. The book is very witty; there are passages of brilliant dialogue and the characters are alive and vigorous, but its essence and *raison d'être* is its doctrine, in the nineteenth century, one would have said its 'message', and there can be little doubt that the author's purpose in writing it was to preach this message.

The message is, (a) metaphysical; it is a statement about the nature of the universe, and (b) ethical; the universe being as stated, we are bidden to live in a certain way and not in other ways, to cultivate certain aptitudes and faculties and not others, to pursue certain ends and eschew others.

The message is, it is obvious, important in the sense that it matters enormously whether the universe is as stated and the right way of life is that which is recommended; what, of course, we want to know about both the morals and the metaphysics is whether they are true. Taken together, the statement about the universe and the recommendation of the way of life fulfil the rôle of what I have called in the early part of this book the 'object'; they are what the book is *about*. And what the prospective reader is entitled to be told is whether they are made to seem, I will not say convincing, but at least plausible.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

### *The Question of Personality and the Question of Truth*

Now this is the one question which the reviewer never raises. Instead of a discussion of the doctrines which the book expounds and advocates, she follows the modern practice of discussing the attitude to the doctrines adopted by their author<sup>1</sup>. Where the question at issue is one of truth, is the universe such as Huxley asserts it to be, she substitutes another question, that of personality, what is it that leads Huxley to assert that the universe is of such and such a kind? Now, in raising this question it does not occur to her to consider on merits the position which Huxley adopts; to ask whether it is inherently plausible or unplausible; to assess the weight or lack of weight of the arguments presented in its favour. She confines herself to a consideration of those factors in Huxley's history and make-up which may be supposed to have influenced him in adopting this particular doctrine. It is as if, in introducing to the reader Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, the lecturer omitted to discuss the evidence on which it was based or the grounds on which it was adduced, and substituted a discussion of those factors in Einstein's personal life which might be conjectured to have led him to think that space is curved and light bent. Here are some examples of Miss Kavan's mode of treatment. Remarking that Huxley appears to be 'formulating a religious mysticism based on the universal identity principle', by which, presumably, she means the principle that reality consists of spirit and that this spirit is present throughout the universe, she remarks that it is 'a rather surprising doctrine for a modern intellectual writer of Mr. Huxley's type to put forward'. Surprising and also, it appears, regrettable. Why regrettable? Not because it is untrue—this question, as I say, is never raised—but because it has been transplanted 'from the place and time of its natural growth to an entirely different climate'. Yet the universe, one would have supposed, has not changed its essential nature in the last five hundred years. If it was like this in the Middle Ages, it is like this now; if the mystical view of the world

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the treatment of Freewill and Determination by Koestler referred to in chapter ix, pp. 222-5.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

was false then, it is false now. 'Ideas', she continues, 'which were appropriate in the era of romanticism'—a curious description of the Middle Ages—'are not easily . . . fitted into the personality-picture of a writer whose talent owes much more to modern psychology than it does to anachronistic . . . doctrines.'

Adopting Miss Kavan's own method, I should say that this means no more than that she personally feels surprised that Huxley should expound mysticism seeing that he, Huxley, knows psychology; a significant, nay an illuminating statement about Miss Kavan, I should add, but it is not immediately apparent that it tells us anything about Huxley. For instead of saying that the doctrines he expounds are false, what, I should go on to insist, she is in effect saying is, 'the fact that somebody who knows as much psychology as Huxley does—and twentieth-century psychology to boot—should hold them occasions me, Anna Kavan, surprise'. An interesting remark, I should conclude, only to those who are interested in Anna Kavan!

She then goes on to ask why he holds such doctrines: 'What has happened to turn Huxley, the clear-headed objective intellectual, into Huxley the symbolist-mystic with a bias towards Yoga and Occultism?' Miss Kavan does not know the answer to this question but suggests, (1) that this mood won't last long—'there is about it a quality of impermanence and unreality', and (2) that it is due to 'some abnormal aspect of the inner and outer environment'. There follows the cryptic remark, 'His doctrine fails to convince; it fails to answer the question; the case of Germany shows that an identity-creed will not prevent emotional immaturity', upon which the appropriate comment seems to be a large and comprehensive interrogation which might be interpreted as conveying the enquiries, (a) what question, since none has yet been posed? (b) what is an 'identity-creed'? (c) what has Germany to do with the matters under discussion?

Forbearing to comment upon the pompous ineptitude of the last sentence, what, I venture to ask, are we to make of all this? The fact to be explained is that Huxley has changed his views. Why has he done so? Because, in Miss Kavan's view of some feature—she calls it an 'abnormal' feature, by which, presumably, she means a feature that she or that most people have not commonly

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

met with—of the ‘inner and outer environment’. That the change has occurred in the ‘inner environment’, she thinks unlikely. This ‘symbolist-mystic’ doctrine, she thinks, has not arisen from ‘within’. Why is it unlikely? Because apparently it is not ‘psychologically consistent’. What follows? I can answer only with my own opinion—although Miss Kavan will probably repudiate it because of its ‘romantically mediaevalist’ associations—that the spiritual nature of the universe has influenced Huxley, pressing upon him from without as ‘object’ and, perhaps, prompting him from within as ‘subject’. It is this that has altered Huxley’s nature and changed his views; in other words, he has responded to the ‘object’.

Why not adopt this straightforward explanation which, incidentally, is Huxley’s own? Because it would involve countenancing the possibility that the view of the universe which Huxley puts forward might be true; or, rather, that it would at least be meaningful and important to enquire whether it is true or not. But this, the only possibility that the author really cares about, the only possibility which, in the last resort, he wants his reader to care about, Miss Kavan refrains from raising. And the reason which prevents her from raising it is, I am suggesting, the same as that which accounts for most of the literary manifestations which I have considered in this chapter. It is a reason which is bound up with what I have called ‘the dropping of the object’. Miss Kavan simply won’t consider ‘the object’ of the book, namely, the doctrine which it preaches. She ‘drops’ that, in order to concentrate on the supposed experiences of Huxley, the subject.

### 3. PLAYS

#### *Author’s Predilections*

It is with diffidence that I venture to extend the bounds of my enquiry into current literary tendencies by a treatment of plays. The fact that I cannot write plays myself is comparatively irrelevant; no one expects of a critic that he should be able himself to perform the activities which he criticizes. What is more to the

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

point is that I have little knowledge of the contemporary theatre and no very great affection for the theatre at any time. Comedy I enjoy and plays of ideas. When the two are combined, as they are combined by Shaw and Wilde, and there is wit, I am enchanted. But for tragedy I have little taste. I am not sufficiently interested in people to be thrilled with plays that are solely concerned to elucidate character and, unlike most of my contemporaries, I desire that a play should be 'about something'. This desire expresses itself in practice in one or other of two ways. Either, I hold, the play should contain the discussion and present the interplay of ideas which will provoke the mind, challenge the understanding, light up the dark places of the universe, expose and seek to heal the sores in our body politic, give guidance in regard to the right conduct of life, awaken the conscience or in some manner, either by contrast or sympathy, reveal us to ourselves; or else I demand a plot whose development should not only waken feelings of suspense and surprise in the audience but should, in the course of its development, exhibit the characters in an interesting and revealing light. (I am putting all this as baldly as I can and trying to say very briefly what I find valuable in a play.)

This means that, for me, either the ideas or the plot constitute in a play what I am generally terming the 'object'. The ideas and the plot are what, if I may so put it, the play is 'about'.

### *Characteristics of the Contemporary Play*

I spoke above of the influence of Chekov on the short story writer. It is, I think, hardly less upon the contemporary playwright. Like the modern short story, the contemporary play presents a slice of life; it also exhibits a tendency to concern itself with the abnormal and the half-witted, the adolescent and the child, particularly if the latter happens to be abnormally frustrated. I am not, of course, here speaking of the ordinary commercial article but of plays which purport to be a serious contribution to the art of the drama. Nor do I wish to suggest that *all* serious contemporary drama conforms to this generalization. Obvious exceptions are the plays of T. S. Eliot and Dorothy Sayers—I am thinking more particularly of *Family Reunion* and *Murder in the*

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

*Cathedral*—the plays of J. B. Priestley, for example *Johnson Over Jordan* or *Time and the Conways*, and the plays of Auden and Isherwood, notably *The Ascent of F6*. All these are clearly concerned to present a play of ideas or to indicate a view of life. They have intellectual content and vision; manifestly they are *about* something. I am speaking only of the *general* tendency of the plays which offer themselves as serious contributions to the drama and merit, therefore, serious dramatic criticism, and this is, I suggest, not dissimilar from the tendency of the general run of contemporary literature, in that they tend to select and concentrate upon the experiences of primitive, inarticulate and puzzled persons. I am further suggesting that this tendency is not unconnected with the fact that contemporary playwrights have little or nothing to say about the conduct of normal life, about the problems of society or the nature of the universe. I should add that often the contemporary play has no plot at all.

I am in the difficulty already referred to of being unable to illustrate these generalizations by a summary of contemporary dramatic works. I have neither the space nor the knowledge.

### *The Two Children*

I select, therefore, one play which I take to be distinctive of the taste and fashion of the time, in that it won a prize offered for a play by an unknown dramatist by that admirable organization the Arts Theatre and was duly performed there, running for a considerable period and being much praised both by the management and the critics. The play was called *The Two Children*. It is a study of futility, more particularly of the futility of the generation that came to maturity in the late 'thirties. Those who were married in the previous generation did not, it is suggested, know how to bring up their children; those who grew to maturity in the 'thirties tended to abstain from marriage and the bearing of children because of the nightmare fear of war overshadowing their horizons. 'Moreover,' they complain, 'our parents did not give us any information about the kind of universe in which we are living and we have nothing, therefore, to believe in; neither creed to canalize our aspirations nor code to guide our steps. War is

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

coming and we don't know how to stop it. Also we don't know for what ends the war will be fought.' The most articulate of these young men of the 'thirties breaks out against the age in which he has grown up. Something, it is clear, is wrong, but he does not know what it is and nobody, he complains, can tell him. Instead of telling him they talk about the need for faith; but faith in what, he asks? Before the play is over, he is talking about the need for faith himself. And that, roughly, is what the play was about. So far as regards form, it had no beginning, no climax and no end; there was, so far as I could see, no reason why the dramatist should ever have put his pen to paper, or why, having once done so, he should ever have withdrawn it. Invoking my two criteria, I felt entitled to complain that the play was equally devoid of plot and of ideas. In consequence, the audience was stimulated neither emotionally by excitement and suspense, nor intellectually by a challenge to its mind. It was, however, by the *mode* of presentation that I was particularly impressed, since this seemed deliberately designed to disguise or to diminish the importance of the small modicum of intellectual content that the play contained. The actors, it seemed, were unable either to sit or to stand; continuously they sat down and as continuously got up; with punctual regularity they went out of the room, only after a moment or two's interval to return to it. When they were not pouring out drinks for one another, they were offering one another matches and lighting their own and one another's cigarettes; the telephone rang frequently, a signal for more getting up and sitting down, and during a large part of the action of the play the sound of gramophone records or radio could be heard offstage.

The effect of all this was to render the players, who seemed to have contracted a habit of speaking under their breath, extremely difficult to hear, while, as if this were not a sufficient sacrifice on the altar of inaudibility, they insisted on jerking remarks at one another while puffing cigarettes with their backs to the audience—all this, I supposed, in the interests of greater naturalness. But was naturalness, I wondered, indeed the reason? Partly, I concluded, it was; but an additional reason was afforded by the author's conviction of the necessity of breaking up the dialogue by a



## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

continuous series of trivial actions, as if author and producer were conscious that what was said was never in itself of sufficient interest to win and to hold unaided the attention of the audience. For the author seemed to be terrified of allowing any of his actors to stand or sit still while making an uninterrupted speech of more than half a dozen sentences. I suppose he realized that he had nothing of very much importance to say and that he must, therefore, do his best whenever he could, to distract the audience from the little that the actors were saying. (In parenthesis, it is, I think, clear that if the content conveyed is intrinsically important, the less the audience is distracted by interruptions of the actors' delivery, the better; for example, in the Hell scene in Shaw's *Man and Superman*, four people discuss for nearly one and a half hours [the eternal topics of philosophy, theology, politics, the government of men and the relations between the sexes, without the aid of telephones, cigarettes, matches, drinks or any other form of interruption; they just sit or stand.]

Having seen a number of plays exhibiting similar characteristics, I venture to suggest a few self-denying ordinances for contemporary playwrights.

(i) That nobody who sits down should be allowed to get up without good reason for a period of three minutes;

¶ (ii) that no topic, once started, should be allowed to be interrupted and broken off (again without good reason) in less than two minutes;

(iii) that in at least one scene there should be neither match strikings, cigarette lightings, drink offerings nor telephone ringings;

(iv) that at no time should the sound of gramophone or radio be heard offstage.

### *Nihilism of Contemporary Art*

The foregoing is, no doubt in part, a digression and I ask forgiveness for it. It helps me, however, to return to the thesis which it serves to illustrate. The fundamental defect with which I am charging the short story, the literary review and the play, the defect which I am taking to be typical in its kind of the art of our times, is that neither story, review nor play is really *about*

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

anything. To revert to the language I have used in the earlier chapters of this book, they have no 'object'. I suggest that one of the reasons why they are not *about* anything is that they are the expressions of an age which has no fundamental beliefs or convictions and, in particular, no beliefs in regard to the existence of an order of reality which is other than that which we can see and touch.

It is an age which having no religion does not believe in God. Hence, it cannot write about Him as Milton did, make music about Him as Bach did, or like the cathedral makers of the early Middle Ages build beautiful structures in His honour.

Moreover, since it is an age whose mind has been largely formed by science and which believes, therefore, only in the existence of what it can see and touch and of things which are of the same kind as those which it can see and touch, it does not believe in the existence of beauty as an immaterial form which can manifest itself in man's handiwork and touch with the surprise of its sudden glory his structures of sound and paint and brick. It does not aspire to make such structures.

Finally, it is an age which does not believe in the dignity of man and does not seek, therefore, to assign him his place and prescribe for him his purpose in the developing scheme of a purposeful universe. In so far as it considers man at all, it thinks of him after the mode which science has made fashionable; he is an accident of evolution, a complex of reflexes, a puppet twitched into love and war by the showman in his unconscious who pulls the strings, or, as the behaviourists would have us believe, a by-product of chemical and physiological processes, pursuing his course across a fundamentally alien and brutal environment and doomed ultimately to finish his pointless journey with as little significance as in the person of the amoeba his ancestors once began it.

## 4. POETRY AND ARCHITECTURE

### *Some Reflections on the Themes of Great Literature*

It is, I think, for these reasons that there is in our own day no outpouring of great poetry. No poet, for example, with

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

the possible exception of T. S. Eliot, sets out 'to justify the ways of God to man', precisely because there is no widespread belief either in God or in justification; for justification, after all, implies purpose and a moral order. It is an arguable proposition—I have neither the space nor the knowledge to embark upon the argument—that all poetry of the highest order springs from and is conditioned by a general philosophy, that is to say, some conception, whether consciously realized or unconsciously held, of the universe as a whole which dominates the mind of the poet; that Blake, for example, is a great poet because his theme is the cosmos; that Wordsworth's greatest poetry is his metaphysical poetry and that his nature poetry is great in proportion as the workings of nature were seen by him in the context of a cosmic background—in proportion as a primrose was, in fact, for him never 'simple'—and that *King Lear* is superior as a play to *Hamlet*, precisely because in *Lear* a cosmic theme, man in revolt against the moral law of the universe and incurring the wrath of the angry Gods, is substituted for the rather squalid drama of purely human relations.

I cannot here pursue these speculations. I content myself with pointing out that it is their pervasion by precisely such themes, their vision of man set against a cosmic background which invests the work of the Greek tragic dramatists with their noble dignity. I should like, however, before leaving the topic to put on record my conviction that all the great prose writers, from Bunyan to Tolstoy, from Swift to Shaw, from Voltaire to Ibsen, have written so well about the human, partly because at the back of their minds there was always present a concern with the more than human. Whether they conceived this 'more' under the guise of God, the Devil, Fate, the Life Force, Providence or of Hardy's 'blind, dumb, unseeing thing', it was never entirely absent from their consciousness and their conception of its ways and purposes for man was the context in which their work was set. Now it is precisely the absence of any such concern and conception which is responsible for the lack of greatness in contemporary writing. Because there is no assurance of a purpose and plan in the universe, contemporary writers focus their attention upon an unanchored humanity. Because there is no conception of anything beyond the human, the human is written about with triviality.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

Human beings are rendered interesting as objects of contemplation and significant as subjects of discourse by virtue of the relations in which they stand and the responses which they make to an objective world transcending themselves ; since it is by virtue of these relations and responses that they are lifted above the level of trivial experience, are touched by beauty, discover truth, seek after goodness and also perform evil. If the consciousness of the non-human 'object' is dropped, there remain only the relations of human beings to each other. But human relations are not, *in themselves*, of sufficiently compelling interest to provide abiding material for great art. It is from this fundamental poverty of theme that some of the peculiarities I have considered in this chapter take their rise, as, for example, the felt need for distraction from the action of the play by cigarettes, drinks and gramophones, the incapacity for sustained discussion, the predilection for the experiences of the abnormal, the half-wit, the pervert and the child, as if, since normal living were not sufficiently exciting, we must invest it with an artificial excitement by presenting abnormal living ; finally, the general doctrine that all human experience is valuable and worthy of note just because it occurs.

### *A Note on Contemporary Poetry*

It would be tempting to pursue this enquiry by seeking to show how contemporary poetry breaks radically and, from my point of view, significantly with the tradition of the past. I have not the knowledge to undertake such an enquiry, yet one or two points may be mentioned which are directly relevant to my main theme. The break with the past is effected in one or other of two ways ; either by a concentration upon form without material, or by a complete absence of form.

When the poet has something of importance to say, a strict form is an advantage to him, because it provides a strait-jacket within which his thought can be confined, raised to a higher level of intensity and then presented with the maximum of effectiveness.

I would refer the reader here to the quotation on the importance of form from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, cited on an

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

earlier page.<sup>1</sup> Where there is nothing of importance to say, the lack makes itself felt in one or other of two ways. Either form becomes an end in itself and is constructed for its own sake as an exercise in *expertise*, irrespective of the content expressed, and we get the literature of an exhausted classicism;<sup>2</sup> or, in full reaction from this, the poet drops form altogether and produces phrases and rhythms which having no structure to which to attach themselves, may be likened to the flotsam and jetsam which is carried on the waters of a flood.

Many of the poems which appear in *Horizon* appear to fall within this second category consisting, as they do, of a mere saying of things which have neither meaning nor form.

Take, for example, the following by Dylan Thomas from the October number of *Horizon*, 1945. The poem is called, 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London.' The first sentence is as follows:

*Never until the mankind making  
Bird beast and flower  
Fathering and all humbling darkness  
Tells with silence the last light breaking  
And the still hour  
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness*

*And I must enter again the round  
Zion of the water bead  
And the synagogue of the ear of corn  
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound  
Or sow my salt seed  
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn*

*The majesty and burning of the child's death.*

Some of the expressions used in this poem seem to be meaningless—for example, sowing 'salt seed' in 'the least valley of sackcloth'; some of the allusions baffle the intellect—what, for instance, is the precise significance of 'the round

<sup>1</sup> See p. 287.    <sup>2</sup> See chapter ii, pp. 57–61.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

Zion of the water bead?' Conscious of my own obtuseness to the finer shades of the poetical art, I forbear comment which might be irrelevant; though it is perhaps relevant to point out that from the reading of this poem neither I nor anybody else to whom I have shown it has been able to derive any pleasure at all. I quote it, however, for the same reason as I have quoted from short stories, because it is typical of dozens of poems written in our time and printed, apparently with approval, in papers which cater for educated persons. But in poetry, form, though important, is not after all the essence of the matter. The essence is what the poet says; is, in fact, the poet's inspiration, and this, I have suggested, comes from without, being the expression in him of that which is other than himself. Inspiration is the poet's apprehension and interpretation of and fertilization by what I have called the 'object'. It is this which, as many great poets have themselves testified, constitutes at once the essence of their poetry and the source of its value. Listen, for example, to Shelley;—'A man,' he writes, 'cannot say "I will compose poetry"'. The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.'

### *And on Architecture*

I turn, accordingly, to architecture. Here the situation is different by reason of the fact that in this art, as in music and painting, the artist's awareness of the 'object' manifests itself less in the material arranged than in the arrangement he imposes upon it, manifests itself, therefore, primarily in form.<sup>1</sup> By this I mean that whereas in literature the 'object' which the artist apprehends whether idea, story, the elucidation of personal relations, the vision of a world set free or of a wrong set right, does not *itself* clothe the physical medium of the words which give it

<sup>1</sup>The contrast here drawn between form and material, according to which the significance of literature is presented as dependent primarily upon what is said, the *content* of material, of architecture, painting and music upon the *arrangement* of the material, upon, in fact, form, is adopted for purposes of exposition only. There is, I suggest, this *prima facie* difference, but it will not, I think, stand up to critical examination.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

expression,<sup>1</sup> in the visual arts, as in music, the 'object' is caused to manifest itself in the material stuff, the paint, or stone, or sound which is the medium in which the artist works, its presence being deducible from the character of the form which the material assumes. In all these arts it is the function of the artist, I have suggested, to penetrate through the world of matter to the world of formal relations which underlies it, and to discern and subsequently to embody in a material setting the structure of what is beyond sense. In so far as this structure—the rhythms, forms and patterns belonging to another order of reality—is caught and embodied, the work will have significance and beauty.

Let me try to apply this theory to architecture. Sir Kenneth Clark has defined ornament in architecture 'as a means of expression which depends upon the acceptance of certain recognized forms.' 'The old books,' he says, 'rightly referred to this kind of ornament as a language, and spoke of the "grammar of ornament"'. That', he goes on, 'is a correct and valuable analogy. Ornament, like language, is a means of expression which depends on the acceptance of certain recognized forms.'<sup>2</sup>

He concludes 'that you can no more invent a new system of ornament than you can invent a new language'. Why can you not? Because if ornament is the expression and embodiment in visible shape and colour of man's apprehension of formal relations, as music is their expression and embodiment in sound, ornament will seem to us to be beautiful or moving or significant, only in so far as these relations have, in fact, been apprehended and are embodied. Now the relations themselves are timeless and unchanging; hence, new significant ornament cannot be *invented*. When we say that a new style of architecture, or of architectural ornamentation which is also beautiful has been invented, what we mean is that originally gifted artists have achieved in time a fresh and arresting vision of formal relations which already exist by virtue of the fact that they are timeless.

One of the many definitions of a decadent age examined in an earlier chapter represents it as one in which an exhausted

<sup>1</sup>It is possible that a reservation might have to be made in regard to the sounds and rhythms of poetry.

<sup>2</sup>In an article 'Ornament and Modern Architecture' which appeared in the *Architectural Review*, December 1943.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

inspiration continues to produce works which observe old forms from which the content has departed.<sup>1</sup> In such ages there is no new vision of the world of form, there is only a sterile copying of the forms in which the fresh vision of the masters of an earlier age was embodied. Words commonly applied to such art are 'sterile' and 'exhausted' and to the age which produces it, 'decadent'.

I agree that such terms may appropriately be used in this connection; yet there is, I would suggest, a later phase whose decadence is still more pronounced. This is the phase in which, in revolt from the exhausted tradition which copies the forms which an earlier age has discovered, artists and architects invent forms of their own and arbitrarily impose them upon their material. Thus, the Victorian architects did not decorate constructions which embodied form; they constructed decorations which were wrought into the forms that they had invented. And because they *were* invented, because they owned no origin save the purely imaginative faculty of the artist, the forms were, for the most part, meaningless, reminding one, in Sir Kenneth Clark's words, of 'sea-weed floating under the tide which lacks the skeleton of growth'.

Now, this doctrine of ornament for its own sake is like the doctrine of experience for its own sake in this, that it dispenses with the 'object'. And just as a recognition of the 'object' confers worth upon those experiences and only upon those which reflect it or which attend its pursuit, so it confers significance upon those ornaments and only upon those ornaments which embody it. Both doctrines, the doctrine of experience for its own sake and the doctrine of ornament for its own sake, are, if my diagnosis is correct, symptoms of decadence.

### *Our Own Time: The Influence of Science upon Architecture*

In our own time there has been a reaction as extreme as any in the history of art and ornament is now as rigorously excised as it was once sedulously cultivated. For this there is a number of reasons. There is, first, the natural reaction from the excesses of

<sup>1</sup> See chapter ii, pp. 57, 58.



## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

Victorian ornamentation. Revolting from the abundance of fussy furniture in a Victorian room, twentieth-century interior decorators planned rooms which bleakly permitted only the barest minimum of necessary objects. At first sight the reaction seemed healthy, presenting itself as a desperate attempt to arrest the growth of the decadent tendencies which it superseded.

Yet it may be questioned whether the attempt has been successful. Decadence, if I am right, occurs where there is no vision of the 'object'. Now to dispel a false vision, though it is a necessary, is not a sufficient condition of achieving a true one. And in the realm of architecture a new influence has for the last thirty years been at work which is no less detrimental to the perception and embodiment of beauty in form than the meaningless ornamentation which it replaced. This is the influence of science.

The climate of our time, as I have in several previous connections had occasion to point out, has been formed by science and the concepts appropriate to scientific thinking. If these concepts are to be trusted, we are to accept as our standard of reality only those things which we can see and touch and the things which are like unto those which we can see and touch.

Eddington has made the same point in a different connection in a famous essay,<sup>1</sup> where he points out that science takes into account only the *measurable* aspects of things. Novel when Eddington first drew attention to it, the point has, of course, been subsequently developed in many books, notably by Eddington himself; it has also been questioned. Nevertheless, the view does, I think, express an important truth about science. The practical conclusions to which it leads are not dissimilar from those which follow from the presumption that only the visible and the tangible are real. Just as from the fact that science can give us information only about what we can see and touch it is inferred that only what we can see and touch is real, so from the fact that science can tell us only about the measurable aspects of things it is deduced that those aspects which cannot be measured, their beauty, for example, or their goodness, do not really belong to them. They are said to be imputed to them or projected into

<sup>1</sup> See his contribution to a composite work entitled, *Science, Religion and Reality*.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

them by our minds, at which point we come within sight of the familiar subjectivist analysis of moral and aesthetic judgments, upon which I have already commented.<sup>1</sup> Now 'form' in the sense in which I have used the term in the foregoing chapters is the expression in matter of the structure of a different order of reality. Hence, it cannot be seen and touched any more than it can be measured. Moreover, as I pointed out in an earlier chapter,<sup>2</sup> when illustrating the difference between half a dozen notes struck at random on the piano and the theme of a Bach fugue, we can give no satisfactory account of why it is that some forms are significant and move us, while others do not.

It follows that an age dominated by the concepts appropriate to science will deny that form is significant precisely because and in so far as it denies that there is an order of reality other than that of which sense experience makes us aware.

Or else it will identify form with utility and then, since *some* acknowledgement must be made of the fact of beauty, it will maintain that to be functional, that is to say, useful, is to be beautiful, which is the aesthetic equivalent of maintaining in ethics that to be useful is to be good. Such I take to be the general background from which the distinctive architectural beliefs and practices of our time derive.

### *Distinctive Architectural Beliefs and Practices*

First, functionalism. The primary purpose of a building is to give shelter, warmth and light. Hence it is urged nothing that interferes with this purpose, nothing that is not immediately necessary to its fulfilment, should be admitted. Hence, no ornament is admitted. The belief is then slipped in that if a building adequately and with complete economy does, in fact, serve the purpose for which it has been created, it will somehow contrive to be beautiful. For the effect of taking away ornament is to throw into relief line and volume and movement and the qualities of surface and texture; how much easier, it is said, to discern and appreciate these, if they are not encrusted with decoration. Hence, if beauty is admitted at all as a distinctive concept, it is line and

<sup>1</sup> See chapters iv and vii, pp. 106-10 and 145-58.    <sup>2</sup> See chapter viii, p. 178.

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

volume and movement and the rest which are conceded to be beautiful. Why are they beautiful? Because the building, or pot, or chair, or dustbin perfectly serves its purpose. That line and volume and texture may be beautiful, nobody, I take it, would wish to deny, but that they *must* be beautiful because the building or object serves its purpose is an arbitrary dogma. There is no *a priori* reason why what serves its purpose should be beautiful; nor is the proposition derived from experience, since a match box or a pen need not be beautiful though they may be; nor is it a truth laid up in heaven to govern the nature of things and so discoverable by the operations of the deductive reason. In short, no arguments of any kind have been produced in its support.

Secondly, there is the belief that machines are beautiful and that if an architectural construction looks like a machine it will have merit. And so we hear both of spare, clean lines and are asked to admire streamlined furniture.

This second belief constitutes a special case of the belief in the aesthetic merit of the functional, for machines are the most functional constructions of man. They exist to perform a function and to serve a purpose and they exist for no other reason at all. Their attributes are also measurable. Hence, belief in the beauty of the machine is both allied and contributes to the two attitudes to which I have already drawn attention, the attitudes, first, that nothing exists that is not measurable, and, secondly, that the business of a building is to perform a function and subserve a need and that this is its *only* business. It follows that beauty, if it exists at all, must be measurable and that it must necessarily invest that which adequately performs its function.

These, I suggest, are among the reasons why modern buildings are without ornament.

### *Relevance of the Foregoing as Illustration of the Main Theme*

I will try to establish the relevance of the foregoing to my main theme. The tendencies, beliefs and valuations to which I have drawn attention illustrate the two main theses of this book.

First, the Victorian addiction to meaningless ornamentation

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

illustrates by analogy what I have called the 'dropping of the object'. In the fine arts the 'object', I have suggested, consists of the forms and patterns which belong to reality. These have traditionally been given expression in ornamentation and decoration wherein men have embodied their vision of significant formal relations. Now, architecture is the most utilitarian of the arts. Hence, to construct a building or a piece of furniture with a view to producing something that is ornamental and with no other object is to make a mistake of precisely the same order as habitually to pursue and value experiences because of their pleasantness and for no other reason. If you try to do so, you will produce something after the nature of the Rajah's Palace which occupies in architecture much the same position as in ethics is assigned to the hedonist's sty. But you can construct a building which is suitable for the purpose of dwelling in or worshipping in or conducting a business in and you can then proceed to decorate it. If you do this, there is at least a possibility that the beauty which you seek will invest your decoration; if you are Michelangelo, the possibility becomes a probability. You will there be found to have embodied the 'object' in a mode of construction which was designed primarily for utilitarian purposes.

But the neglect of the 'object' is shown no less by the absence of ornament than by its meaningless excess. As Sir Kenneth Clark has pointed out, ornament in architecture has been universal in all ages except our own, as universal as religion. When we dropped it, we dropped it as we dropped religion, because we no longer retained a belief in the existence of another order of reality and the 'objects', that is to say, the forms and values, which belong to it.

Hence, secondly, the modern elimination of ornament and concentration upon function illustrates by analogy the belief in the value of experience as an end in itself. This is a further corollary of the 'dropping of the object'. If it *is* experience, it *must* be significant, says the modern thinker; if it serves its function, it *must* be beautiful, says the modern architect. Indeed, this is what each cannot help but say, since, if they were to acknowledge an object of experience which, being other than the experience might confer value upon it, and an object of vision which, owning an

## THE LITERARY CULTURE OF OUR TIME

origin beyond the inventive faculty of the architect's mind, might confer beauty upon the work of his hands, they would have to admit the existence of another order of reality. Thus, if I am right, the absence of ornament in architecture and the corresponding insistence upon the performance of function illustrate the same doctrine as that which in its application to experience I have already diagnosed as a sign of decadence.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Application to Politics

I propose in this chapter to say something of the effects of the 'dropping of the object' in politics. Briefly these are the pursuit of power for its own sake and a planning of the resources of society and of the life of its members in the interests of efficiency, rather than of ideals. I will say something of each of these in turn.

#### 1. POWER AS AN END

##### *The Impulse to Power*

'The admiration of power in others,' says Hazlitt, 'is as common to man as the love of it in himself. The one makes him a tyrant, the other a slave'. Dr. Johnson confirms that 'there are few minds to which tyranny is not delightful'. In his book, *Power*, Bertrand Russell expresses the view that power is the common driving force that moves men in the social sphere as energy is the common driving force that moves matter in the physical world. Historians and political philosophers have, he thinks, made the mistake of emphasizing one or other of the many expressions of the power impulse, for example, the desire for economic power, for military power or for what he calls 'propaganda power', that is, the power which resides in ideas, as if they were themselves the motive forces of social events, whereas, in fact, each of these is the expression of something more fundamental, namely, the impulse to power as such. Hence, the purpose of his book is described as the endeavour 'to prove that the fundamental concept in social science is Power in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics'. The notion that 'economic self-interest could be taken as the fundamental motive in the social

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

sciences' is, he thinks, the distinguishing heresy of our age. I think that Russell is right in this analysis.

Common to all men in all ages, the impulse to power takes in our own a number of forms which are peculiarly harmful. I think it will be easier to see why this is so, if I first indicate the conditions which must be satisfied if the use of power is to be beneficial. They are three:

(i) That power should be bound up with and used for impersonal purposes; that it should not, that is to say, be pursued for its own sake.

(ii) Secondly, that these purposes should be such as can be fulfilled without deprivation or harm to others.

(iii) Thirdly, that the means adopted for their fulfilment should not outweigh in their badness the goodness of the effects which are anticipated from fulfilment.

### *(i) The 'Dropping' of the Impersonal Ends of Power*

The exercise of power for its own sake is the greatest temptation of able and vigorous men. The second-rate man wants money, the first-rate wants power. 'Let us candidly admit', says Bossuet, 'that there is no temptation equal to that of power, nor anything more difficult than to refuse yourself anything, when men grant you everything.' It is in the difficulty of this refusal that the major defect of power, considered as an end, consists. For the desire for power is a desire which can never be satisfied since, however much power a man has, he will never think that he has enough. Yet from the very nature of the human condition, because he *is* a man and not a god, his power will always be limited. There are always other kingdoms outside the confines of that which he rules; there is always an end, the end of death, to the power which he exercises, while after death the power of his name fades. We can none of us be for ever famous. Even the power we enjoy is made precarious by competition, while we ourselves become odious through envy. The powerful man, like the rich man, wishes to be loved for himself alone, but this is an assurance he can never have.

Thus, for a variety of reasons there is always something unsatisfying about power. 'He gave them their desire', is the

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

Psalmist's verdict on successful ambition, 'and sent leanness withal into their souls.'

Power is, nevertheless, very sweet, so sweet that few have been found willing voluntarily to relinquish it. In Russia the securely established Communist State shows no signs of 'withering away', while history, so far as I am aware, records the case of only one dictator, Sulla, who at the height of his power relinquished it of his own accord and retired into private life.

Plato points out that of all human appetites the impulse to power grows most with what it feeds on. If it is not checked or subordinated to some impersonal end, it develops into a tyrant desire which dominates our whole being, drawing all our energies into its service and subordinating all our other desires to its rule. Readers may remember the striking account of the 'tyrannic man' and the analogy which is drawn between him and the 'tyrannic State' in the eighth and ninth books of the *Republic*.

For these reasons, power, if its effects are to be beneficial and not harmful, must be harnessed to some outside and impersonal purpose. By this I mean that the power-possessor must feel convinced that certain ends other than that of his own satisfaction are intrinsically good and worth pursuing for their own sakes and must be willing to use his power in the service of these impersonal ends. Thus, Lenin sought and used power in order to strike the chains of economic slavery from the workers of the world; Cromwell was a fervent believer in one of the many 'only true religions' and regarded himself as an instrument chosen by God to bring light to the children of darkness. These men must be distinguished from such power-pursuers as Hitler, Alexander and Napoleon who, so far as one can judge their motives, seem to have pursued power wholly or mainly for its own sake, or from Milton's Satan, who is the archetype of all pure power lovers.

Successful power lovers fall into a number of false beliefs in regard to the importance of the human in general and of themselves in particular. Since they flourish by means of these beliefs, they foment them in the societies which they dominate. For example, they tend to adopt the maxim of Protagoras that 'man is the measure of all things'. This leads to a purely pragmatic and utilitarian philosophy which holds that the meaning of good is



## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

what promotes human purposes and of truth, what it is helpful or useful for men to believe, and expresses itself in a subjectivist analysis of moral and political judgements, according to which to say that something is right means no more than that the speaker happens, or that the society to which he belongs happens to approve of it.

*Superior Person, Parties, Races and States.* A familiar development of Protagoras's maxim is that the *great or powerful man* is the measure of all things, which finds expression in the Nietzschean doctrine of the superman with its corollary that the great man is exempt from the dictates of morality which are only a rationalization of the timidities of the herd. The criterion both of truth and value lies, for Nietzsche, 'in the enhancement of the feeling of power'. Hence, those who have the capacity and the will to exercise power are regarded as ethically admirable irrespective of the purposes for which they exercise it. 'What is noble?' asks Nietzsche; and answers, 'to be able to command and to obey'. He proceeds to call for 'a new nobility . . . which shall be the adversary of all populace rule'. The morality appropriate to ordinary persons is utilitarianism. It is distinguished from the morality of 'the powerful' by reason of the fact that 'it keeps its advantage steadily in view' and is not 'tempted to inexpedient activities by its impulses'. Such is the morality of Christianity, a morality appropriate to slaves and cowards. The successful power wielder is not bound by this morality. His sentiments towards the many are a blend of benevolence and contempt. '*We* bear no grudge against them, these good lambs,' Nietzsche generously concedes, 'we even like them; nothing is tastier than a tender lamb'. Might is right, says Nietzsche in effect, and adds quite rightly. Parallel expressions of the same doctrine are that the superior party is exempt from the canons of morality as, for example, the Communist Party in its dealings with non-Communists or the Nazi Party in its dealings with Communists and Liberals, and that the superior race is above the law in its treatment of other races, for example, the Germans in their treatment of Jews.

It is, however, in the aggrandisement and worship of the State that the power impulse is, in the modern world, most distinctively

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

manifested. This impulse finds expression both in the power which the State exercises over its own citizens and in its claim to exercise power over other States. The notion that a State has a being or a personality of its own and that this personality is entitled to the absolute obedience and personal sacrifice of its members, that it need acknowledge no obligation save the obligation to further its own development, that it has a historic destiny to fulfil, a sacred mission to perform, vital interests to serve, and that in such fulfilment, performance and service it need take no account of the commonly accepted canons of morality being, in fact, a moral law unto itself—this notion fathered upon the world by Fichte and Hegel and supported by a variety of thinkers in all Western countries<sup>1</sup> increasingly dominates the theory and perverts the practices of modern States, until today the anarchy created by the unbridled sovereignties of amoral power-seeking States bids fair to bring down the whole structure of civilization in ruins<sup>2</sup>.

*The Power of the State.* States rationalize their power-seeking in various ways. They demand *lebensraum* or a place in the sun; they claim to be defending their national culture and way of life; they aspire to 'look one another in the face' or 'to fulfil their destinies'. But ultimately it is by the pride of power and nothing but the pride of power that States are animated. Moreover, through the command which the power of opinion gives them over the minds of their subjects, they induce them to further their ambitions irrespective of the effect of such furtherance upon their subjects' happiness. For, as Lord Acton wrote nearly a hundred years ago, 'Nationality does not aim either at liberty or prosperity, either of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mould and measure of the State.' The power wielded by great States is the distinctive form which the impulse to power assumes in our age, while the doctrines that sanctify its use, whenever the State's interest demands, are its distinctive heresy.

*The Impersonal Ends of Power.* Now this pursuit of power as an

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iii, pp. 79–82, for a development of this theme.

<sup>2</sup> I cannot resist the temptation of adding an illustrative quotation from one of our English philosophers. 'The State,' says Dr. Bosanquet in his book *The Philosophical Theory of the State*, 'is the guardian of a whole world but not a factor within an organized moral world. . . . It is hard,' he continues, 'to see how the State can commit theft or murder in the sense in which these are moral offences'.

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

end by individuals and by States is inevitable where no impersonal end is recognized as possessing intrinsic value and, therefore, as justifying the acquirement and exercise of power. Examples of such impersonal ends are the service of mankind in which the Quakers engage, the alleviation of the lot of dispossessed classes as demanded and pursued by the early Socialists, the freeing of slaves or the spread of Christianity among the heathen. They include also the values described elsewhere in this book, include, therefore, the cultivation of beauty, the pursuit of truth and the advocacy of codes of morals and modes of behaviour which are deemed superior to those which their advocates wish to supersede. It is, I suppose, in what has been believed to be the service of God and the spread of His word that power for non-human ends has been most fruitfully exercised. It is, I hope, unnecessary to emphasize the point that the conviction that beauty, that goodness, above all that God exist and are real, is a presupposition of the effective pursuit and use of power in their service.

Now ours is an age in which, for reasons already given, it is rarely that impersonal ends are recognized as 'objects' possessing intrinsic worth. Where traditional beliefs decay and no new ones come to take their place, where there are no agreed objective ends to which men feel it right to subordinate themselves, there is no check to the ambitions of persons, parties and States. Hence, our own age tends to be power ridden to a peculiar degree. If I am right in my general diagnosis of the 'dropping of the object' as characteristic of decadent ages, then the overweening desire for personal and national power which the 'dropping of the object' fosters may be accounted a symptom of decadence.

### *(ii) Competitive and Non-Competitive Goods*

Certain goods are non-dividing and non-competitive; these goods constitute ends and purposes whose pursuit and fulfilment involve neither competition with nor deprivation of others. Two characteristics of these goods are that they are infinitely shareable and infinitely extensible. Other goods have the opposite attributes; they are limited and finite. Since there are not enough of them to go round, they must be competed for and divided

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

among their competitors. For this reason they divide those who pursue them. To the second class of goods belong money and power.

The amount of available wealth is—or has been hitherto—limited; if, therefore, *you* have it, *I* have it not. It follows that, in so far as you are successful in achieving wealth as an end, I shall be deprived by your success. If we seek to overcome this disability by artificially increasing the amount of available money, we produce inflation and, by depreciating the value of money, deprive ourselves of the thing we value.

I have inserted the modification 'or has been hitherto' in the preceding paragraph because of the new possibilities arising from the conquest of atomic power. It is, presumably, conceivable that the application of atomic energy to the processes of production might result in such an increase of commodities as to constitute what amounted for all practical purposes to unlimited wealth. If this were, in fact, to happen, the desire for wealth would be superseded by the desire for power. The transformation of the desire for wealth into the desire for power can frequently be observed in our own civilization; for example, in the case of the millionaire who has little value for the money which he possesses so abundantly except in so far as it enables him to exercise power over others. The transforming process is more marked in the sons, more marked still in the grandsons of self-made men. Having been born to take money for granted, they evince none of that feeling for its value which in their fathers was once a consuming passion and transfer their allegiance from the god of money to the god of power as a witness to their own transformation from plutocrat into aristocrat. The substitution of power for money as an end is, indeed, one of the signs of the transformation of a plutocracy into an aristocracy.

There seems to be something peculiarly unsatisfying about money as an end, if we may judge from the frequency which those who have grown accustomed to its use make light of it and treat it merely as a means to some other end. I have mentioned the passage of money into power; but there is also money into vanity. A man who has made money is often seen to spend not upon himself but upon his dependants, that he may feed his

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

vanity by displaying to the world the fact of his being rich enough to keep them in idleness. Thus the lackeys of very rich men wear conspicuously unserviceable uniforms; their wives have long nails and soft hands, thereby demonstrating that they are emancipated from the need to do manual work; they keep lap dogs and Pekinese, thus displaying their ability to afford to keep and look after, or to pay other people to keep and look after, dogs who are strictly useless; and they wear, or used to, crinolines or skirts adorned or constricted with bustles or hobbles, in order to show that they are exempt from the necessity of having to go far on foot. It is partly from the same motive that fashionable women walk about on small wooden pegs which they call heels.

The theory of conspicuous waste and vicarious ostentation whereby a man displays his wealth not in his own person but in that of those who are known to be dependent on him is worked out with a wealth of diverting examples in Veblen's celebrated book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

I turn, then, as the aristocrat turns, from money to power.

The amount of power which is available in any given community is, like the amount of money, limited. A may exercise power over B, B over C and C over D, but, ultimately, we must come to somebody who submits to power without exercising it. A society in which all exercise power over all would be self-contradictory. In general, the more power that some succeed in obtaining, the less there is for others; power, then, is limited and, because limited, dividing and competitive. In proportion as I have it, you have it not. The same is true, though less obviously, of fame and social position. There cannot be a community in which all are famous because there would be none to make them so, while 'Society' women feel that 'Society' in the strict sense could not exist unless not only were many women excluded from its inner circle, but also unless there were many women to exclude.

It follows that a society whose members aim at wealth, power, fame and social position is a society whose values are inconsistent with stability and contentment, since where men value as ends in themselves goods which are limited and dividing, the possessors will be few and the deprived many, with the result that many will be restless and disappointed. Now, restless and disappointed

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

citizens are a source of weakness and instability, as the history of European States immediately prior to the rise of Fascism abundantly testifies.

The distinction between dividing and competitive goods and those which are infinitely divisible, because infinite in extent, is obvious. My enjoyment of beauty in art and nature does not interfere with yours; on the contrary, it enhances it by helping to create an environment in which art and nature are cultivated and loved. The same is true of my pursuit of truth in science, philosophy and history, except in so far as governments seek to monopolise particular items of scientific truth discovered by their nationals, which they think will confer upon them superior efficiency in destruction, as, for example, at the time of writing, the appropriation and monopolization by the governments of the U.S.A. and, in a lesser degree, of Great Britain of the processes involved in the manufacture of the atomic bomb.

That increase of goodness in an individual is a help and not a hindrance to similar increases in others is obvious. Happiness is infectious, so much so, that many have prescribed the duty of happiness not so much because of the advantages it confers upon the happy self, as because of the benefits which the happy self brings to others. All these are independent values, constituting examples of what I have called the 'object'.

Now it must be admitted that men may in theory have desired power in order that, having achieved it, they might use it to further the pursuit of 'objects' of this kind. Many men have in fact sought to obtain elevated positions conferring economic independence and freedom from interference in order that they might devote themselves to the pursuit of learning, the encouragement and cultivation of art, or the service of their fellows. Other men, again, have sought power and authority over their fellows in order that they might use them as agents for the 'spreading of the truth', as they would call it, by preaching the Gospel, increasing literacy, extending the scope and range of education, or inculcating correct views about politics. Finally, men have, in some instances, desired power, in order to increase the general happiness, although few of those who have desired it for this purpose have succeeded in obtaining it, and fewer still, having obtained it, have used it for the purpose

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

for which they originally desired it. To translate this in terms of Plato's celebrated phrase, it is rarely that philosophers have been kings, or kings philosophers. It is not, however, difficult to see that in an age such as our own in which the consciousness of the 'object' has largely been lost, the chances of power being desired to facilitate the pursuit of impersonal ends will be diminished.

There is another reason for the instability of States in which the main objects of desire are competitive and dividing, because limited, goods; it is that men find co-operation easier on the basis of a common loyalty to an agreed and impersonal end. Thus, in China, family businesses have tended to be successful because of common loyalty to the family; the Society of Friends has co-operated successfully because of their common agreement in regard to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and as to the ends to which the prompting of the Holy Spirit directed them; armies fight better when they believe themselves to be fighting for a cause or participating in a crusade, for example, Cromwell's Ironsides, or the armies of revolutionary France and Republican Spain, and seem to be able to function effectively with considerably less discipline than has been found to be necessary in the case of regular armies. Finally, religious communities have been noticeably more successful in securing the co-operation and devotion of their members on the basis of a common service and devotion to God than any other form of human grouping; they are, indeed, the only communities which have succeeded for any period in holding all things in common according to the tenets of practical Communism. The contrary of this truth would appear to be that those communities which are *not* imbued with a fairly widespread agreement as to what things are true, what things are valuable, what way of life ought to be followed and what code of morals observed, will be less stable and their members will be less disposed to voluntary co-operation. Therefore, they will tend to play for their own hands and to pursue power for personal ends.

### *(iii) The Purposes of and Means to Power*

The third condition, that the means adopted to secure power should not outweigh in the disadvantages that attend them the

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

value of the results which they are designed to achieve, is so obvious as to be a truism. It is, however, rarely that it has been satisfied. The truism receives particular illustration in its application to war. It may plausibly be argued that the conditions under which modern wars are waged ensure that both victors and vanquished will be worse off after a war than they were before it, while even if some of the results which war achieves are good, they would seem to be outweighed in point of value by the miseries involved in their achievement.

What has just been urged in regard to war may be extended to cover all cases in which good ends are pursued by means which are doubtful or bad. This is because, as Aldous Huxley has pointed out, means tend to condition ends. It is, indeed, difficult to read his book, *Ends and Means*, without endorsing his conclusion that it is well-nigh impossible for men to pursue good ends by employing doubtful means without in the course of and as the result of their employment modifying or even losing sight of the ends which the means were originally designed to achieve. This is because of the conditions which must usually be complied with, if power is to be achieved. Broadly speaking, a man cannot achieve power unless he is prepared to use force and cunning which insensibly alter his character and so modify the purposes for which he first desired to obtain the use of power. The modification is often unnoticed by the person concerned; but the fact that the ends achieved are different from those which the individual set out to pursue is apparent not only to the historian but to the individual's contemporaries, who not only observe the substitution but all too often suffer from it.

The conclusion of history would seem to be that it is hard, perhaps impossible, to combine power and righteousness.

These are secular considerations and, in so far as they are valid, they operate in all ages. There is, however, a consideration peculiar to our own time which increases the evils resulting from the pursuit of power by forcible methods.

*Power Through Science.* Power today is largely based upon science. This introduces two new features. (a) In the first place, science gives to the modern State a power over individuals greatly in excess of that hitherto wielded by the most absolute of despots.



## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

This power is exercised partly over men's bodies, both over those of the State's own citizens and over the citizens of other States. Machines can poison their crops and their water, infect their food with bacteria and disintegrate the matter of which their cities and their bodies are composed. At the end of the corridor along which modern science advances, there sits a blind, deaf and palsied cripple who, by the pressure of his finger upon a button, can destroy an army corps of hundreds of thousands of healthy men.

But science also gives power over men's minds, which is chiefly exercised at the expense of the State's own citizens. Hitherto, whatever outrage was committed upon men's bodies, their minds, at least, were free, since, while the body could be observed, the mind could not. But the Nazis have shown what can be done by modern psychological methods to manufacture the minds of children, not to speak of their treatment of the 'diseased' minds of pacifists, liberals and communists by the 'conditioning' of the concentration camp. When more is known about pre- and post-natal conditioning and the most effective methods of propaganda in schools, when account is taken of possible extensions of mind control by the treatment of the brain by wireless and, conceivably, electro-magnetic waves, it is obvious that an enormous extension of power awaits governments who have the wit to make an intelligent use of science to ensure the conformity of the wills of the people to the purposes of the government. The modern State further resembles the medieval Church in claiming on occasion a monopoly in the products of its citizens' minds; this, at least, is true when the citizen is a scientist. In the spring of 1946 a young scientist, Dr. Nunn May, who had been engaged on work connected with the development of atomic energy, was charged and sentenced on the ground that he had communicated information to unauthorized persons. The British State was at peace at the time and the unauthorized persons were members of another State with whom we had been allied in the recent war and with whom we were still in alliance. The actual charge brought against Dr. May was a breach of the Official Secrets Act. In effect, it was said that he had broken the pledge of secrecy to which as an employee of the British State he had been sworn; having promised

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

to keep silent in respect of certain matters he had not, in fact, been silent. But as scientists were quick to see, the real issue went deeper. The real issue was whether scientific knowledge should be earmarked as the exclusive national possession of a particular State or whether it belonged to mankind as a whole. For the charge against and conviction of Dr. May certainly appeared to imply that scientific knowledge, instead of being regarded, as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries regarded it, as the fruit of the mind's disinterested pursuit of truth and, therefore, as the possession of mankind as a whole, is treasure trove discovered in the course of the citizen's performance of service to his State and belongs, therefore, to the State and only to the State which employs the citizen. For the first time since the Middle Ages it has become a crime punishable by imprisonment to conduct independent research into the workings of nature and to divulge its results. This involves a substitution of false for true 'objects'. Just as in the Middle Ages the Church, so in our own time the State imposes itself as 'object' in a sphere in which the appropriate 'object' is truth.

*The Impersonality of Power Derived from Machines.* (b) The other new feature which science introduces is the impersonality which characterizes the relations between the exerciser of and the submitter to power. Hitherto one of the motives which prompted A's exercise of power over B has been afforded by the remembrance of the pleasure which has accompanied the similar exercise of power in the past, A liked to see B turn pale, cringe and fawn as he carried out A's orders. This is the power of the sergeant in the barrack yard.

A has also enjoyed using his power to produce changes in B. Human beings, and especially male human beings, seem to be imbued by an impulse to stamp their individuality upon many of the objects with which they come into contact—upon trees, upon landscapes, upon children, upon women, seeking by this means to mould and shape them nearer to their heart's desire; every man, in fact, is at heart a Pygmalion to somebody or something. Perhaps the best example of this tendency is afforded by the parental attitude to children. Throughout the centuries children have been the passive ends of an age-long drive to turn them

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

into the sort of beings which their elders would have them be. For six centuries a spate of admonitory prose and verse has been aimed at children, with the object of changing them from natural children, 'imps of wrath' and 'limbs of Satan', into moralized versions of their adult admonishers.

These tendencies, I say, seem to be eternal in man. In our own time, however, a new form of power relationship has arisen which is modelled upon man's relation to machines. The relation of men to machines extends to and increasingly informs their relations to other men. The machine-man is in essence a manipulator and it is natural that, when he comes to deal with human beings, he should tend to regard them too as subject matter for manipulation. He thinks of them as raw material for experiments to be cut and trimmed to pattern, as the gardener cuts and trims a box hedge, or moulded, as the zoologist moulds his newts and axolotls, or observed, as the geneticist observes his fruit flies.

This tendency is reinforced by the lack of personal contact which the machine introduces between the exerciser and the victim of power. No young man would willingly bash together the heads of two children until their skulls were smashed, but, if he is an airman, he feels little or no compunction in dropping a bomb upon a school, even when he knows that the result will be to shatter hundreds of young heads. This is because, though he knows with his reason, he does not see with his eyes, or hear with his ears, the effects of his action; in other words, he is not harrowed by the suffering he causes but remains detached and aloof, having no more personal contact with his victims than the volcano which engulfs them in its eruption or the lightning which burns them with its fire.

Thus, the effect of modern science is to take the personal element out of killing, with the result that power is exercised more pitilessly than before, since occasions for the exercise of pity and pity's restraints do not arise. Hence, it becomes more important than heretofore that those who hold power should be guided by moral imperatives in its use. To put it bluntly, there was never so much need of the Christian virtues as in a world in which man's power to do harm through the lack of them is so

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

vastly increased. Yet the Christian virtues cannot be practised with effect unless there is a recognition of an independent, non-human order of reality which constitutes the objective ground for the ends which we know to be valuable and provides a justification for the course of conduct which duty prescribes—unless, to return to my formula, there is an awareness of the ‘object’. This awareness is lacking today. Hence, the effects of power in modern societies are at once greater and more dangerous than they have been in the past.

## 2. PLANNING AS AN END

Planning as an end should, I think, be treated separately from power as an end since its purpose is different, even if the motive from which it springs is often the same. The object of power-seeking may in general be defined as the production of those effects which are desired because they are thought to be of benefit to the self. As we have seen, however, a certain proportion of power seekers have desired power in order that they might benefit other people. The benefit of other people is also the *ostensible* object of planning, but while most power-wielders who wanted to benefit their fellows were chiefly concerned to produce effects on their minds and spirits—they have wished to teach them the true faith, to convert them to right views of politics, or to save their souls from damnation—the main object of planning is to confer benefits by so administering the resources of the community that they may be utilized with the maximum effect for the good of all. But the benefits of planning are not limited to the material sphere; we can plan for beauty as well as for convenience, and planning has played a large part in engendering the aesthetic effect of such cities as Bath and Edinburgh, where the streets have been deliberately laid out according to a prearranged pattern and the houses built to fit into it. In this sense, planning is, we are all agreed, an indispensable item in the future progress of civilized communities. Indeed, for many, it both sets the direction and constitutes the standard of progress.

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

### *Planning as a Means*

Whether we are Communists, Nazis, Social-democrats, or scientists, we are all agreed that State ownership or, at least, State control of production, reinforced by State control of wages and prices, is more desirable precisely because it is more efficient than *laissez faire* Capitalism.

By this is meant that whatever the community as a whole, or the dominant class in the community, desires to achieve or to be done, the desired 'something' will be achieved more fully or performed more rapidly if there is planning, than it will be if there is not. If then, in a modern community, planning is the most efficient means to any social end, it follows that it also is a means, and in certain departments the most efficient means, to those ends that are good. But although it is necessary it is not, therefore, sufficient. Whether planning is good or bad depends upon the nature of the ends for which we plan; if the ends are bad, then the more planning, the worse, precisely because planning will enable the bad ends to be more effectively realized. Planning from this point of view is like science; it is, indeed, the method of science applied to communities. Like science it is ethically neutral. Its purpose is to enable communities to gratify their desires and to further their purposes. If their desires are on the whole good and make for happiness, then the added power of gratification, the increased capacity for furtherance, is an added good, because it enables the good to be more effectively realized; if bad, it is an added bad. I am here only putting in modern terms what Plato and Aristotle meant when they insisted that politics is not an end in itself but a means to the realization of ends beyond itself. These ends should be set by ethics. Politics, therefore, is a means to the realization of ethical ends.

### *Planning Treated as an End*

Once this obvious point is realized, it will be seen that there are two closely related dangers in the contemporary attitude to planning. The first is that planning which, rightly regarded, is a means should come to be treated as an end. When this happens,

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

the efficient functioning of industry and the efficient administration of the State tend to be regarded as goods in themselves. It is thought sufficient that the industrial machine should run smoothly and that production should be high irrespective of the nature of the goods produced, or the way in which the goods are used, just as it is thought sufficient that the State should be efficiently administered irrespective of the kind of life it offers to its citizens or its success in equipping them to lead a *good* life. It may be added that many States also desire efficient administration in order that they may become 'great'; this, however, is a by-product of the power motive which we have already considered.

Examples of these tendencies may be seen in the U.S.S.R., in regard to which Koestler in the chapter entitled *Explanations* in his book, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, points out very properly that 'Nationalization and planning may lead to Socialism or Fascism—it depends on the political and ethical context . . . . A planned state-controlled economy is the inevitable next step of historical evolution, and thus "progressive" in the same sense as industrialization, nationalization, air-transport and artificial manure.' 'But,' he comments, 'power stations, artificial manure, state control, or planning are as such neither "Left" nor "Right"; they are "progressive" in a purely mathematical sense—they represent progress in time not on any social and ethical plane.'

The ultimate logical development of these tendencies is presented to us in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where a physically comfortable and psychologically adjusted life is offered to all workers in return for the surrender of individual initiative and the abolition of the life of the spirit. The insects have carried them further and their apogee is seen in the termitary and the beehive, where every member of the community performs with complete efficiency and unvarying diligence the specialized functions which are necessary to the maintenance of the community as a whole. The maintenance and the efficient functioning of the beehive and the termitary are themselves ends; there is no end beyond them which the individual worker is enabled more effectively to realize *because of* the efficient functioning of the whole. I shall have more to say in the last chapter about possible developments on these lines of present tendencies in our own society.

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

### *The Recognition of the 'Object' A Necessary Condition of a Right Attitude to Planning*

I am concerned here to point out that this development is less likely to occur where ends which are objective, in the sense that they are not brought into being by man and man's communities, and independent, in the sense that they are not dependent upon the continued life of man and his communities, are recognized as existent and conceived as desirable. In other words, when human communities are efficiently administered and their members' lives are freed from fear and want, they will be more disposed to pursue beauty, to seek after truth, to achieve goodness and to aspire to know God, if they recognize that these are independent 'objects' which exist as ends for pursuit and goals for endeavour. Granted this recognition, men may fruitfully use the leisure which planning gives them to live good and valuable lives; in its absence, they will tend to regard individual experience as an end in itself and to identify value in experience with the increase of pleasurable sensations. In other words, they will tend to embrace the doctrines, to accept the standards and to live the lives which, in the early chapters of Part I, I provisionally identified with decadence.

I conclude that the recognition of the 'object' is one of the conditions of planning being treated, as it should be treated, as a means, and that, in the absence of such recognition, planning tends to be regarded as an end.

### *Effects of Power over Nature*

The second danger in the contemporary attitude to planning is that the power over nature which science gives should come to be regarded as a good in itself and its exercise, therefore, to be treated as an end irrespective of any further good which such exercise may bestow.

The possession of the power to perform deeds whether good or evil has always tended to cause the deeds to be performed. Thus, the strongest military power at any given time has throughout history tended to be aggressive. We, for example, enjoyed our own greatest years of military supremacy under Cromwell. The

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

consciousness of superior strength drew from Cromwell's court poet, Andrew Marvell, the announcement:

*'A Caesar he ere long to Gaul,  
To Italy an Hannibal,  
And to all States not free  
Shall climacteric be . . .'*

with more to the same effect.

Our own age is deeply imbued with this tendency. The fact that an invention has been introduced, or a process perfected which enables human beings to do something they have never done before, to move faster, to transport matter more rapidly and over longer distances, to produce more commodities or different kinds of commodities, for example, compressed food in the form of tablets, or preserved food in tins or cans, or dehydrated food, or refrigerated food, as substitutes for natural food which is unsterilized, unfrozen, does not keep and occupies a wasteful amount of space, to fire rockets or to travel in them to the moon, to communicate with Mars, to disintegrate matter, or to kill one another in ever more efficient ways and from ever greater distances, is accepted as a sufficient reason for making use of the invention or applying the process, irrespective of whether such employment and application will make the employers and appliers happier or wiser or more virtuous than they were before. It is not always necessary to contend even that the invention or the process will make us richer; it is sufficient that it should be new and should illustrate and give effect to men's power over nature in new ways. For example, in the week during which this chapter is being written the papers are concerned with the possibility of considerably increasing the speed of aircraft engine power, now apparently great enough to propel aircraft through the air at speeds greatly exceeding the existing five or six hundred miles an hour. There is, however, a difficulty. Once a speed exceeding that of sound is achieved, the air around the moving object begins to behave in a peculiar way; instead of flowing over and under the wings of the aeroplane, like water cleft by the prow of a ship, it compresses itself into a solid mass around it. This is because at super-sonic



## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

speeds the aeroplane overtakes the pressure waves set up by its passage. Butting into this barrier, it is subject to strains and pressures which break it.

If, then, the speed of aeroplanes is to be increased beyond its present range, this barrier must somehow be surmounted. Hints are dropped to suggest that success in this matter is already in a fair way to being achieved. The Under Secretary for Air has congratulated Parliament on the fact that the British are, indeed, nearer to success in this field than other countries.

Now, throughout the discussion of the subject, it never occurs to anyone to raise the question *why* this thing should be done. This, says the leader in the newspaper, 'is our problem which must now be solved'. It does not stop to enquire what end will be served by solving it; whether, for example, its solution will make men happier or better, or even whether it will contribute to peace. It is thought enough to point to the fact that, if it is solved, a new revolution in speed will have occurred. A new revolution in speed, which means the ability more rapidly to alter the position of pieces of matter in space, is treated as an end in itself. Or is it, perhaps, thought that the solution of the problem will enable men to destroy other men more effectively than they can do at present?

Earlier in this chapter I quoted a remark of Lord Acton's<sup>1</sup> designed to emphasize the neglect of the happiness of their citizens by States which are ambitious for power. 'Nationality,' he said, 'does not aim either at liberty or prosperity, either of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mould and measure of the State.' He might have added that the urge to make use of the results of applied science is also indifferent to happiness.

In our own time these two impulses, the impulse of the State to power and the impulse of modern man to apply the results of science, tend to combine, with the result that the level of man's happiness in the present is low and the prospects of his future dark. Prophetically, the quotation from Lord Acton just cited concludes: 'Its course' (that is to say, the course of nationality) 'will be marked with material as well as moral ruin in order that

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 325.

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

a new invention may prevail over the works of God and the interests of mankind.'

### *The Temptation of Machines*

The current 'rage' for planning fosters an attitude to new technical advances and inventions which leads to their employment and application irrespective of the nature of the consequences. It also illustrates what I have described above as the manipulative attitude to human beings, which regards them as raw material to be fitted into schemes and patterns of organization and proceeds to train and mould them until the fit is effected.

Once again these tendencies can be checked if, and one is tempted to say, only if, 'objects' are recognized as possessing independent worth. It is by the effect of their efforts in promoting or obscuring this recognition that all makers and moulders, including those moulders of society whom we call planners, should be judged. If the effect is to obscure the 'object' by generating, as it is apt to generate today, a type of man who finds in machines satisfaction not only for his manipulative tendency but also for such apology for spiritual needs as may remain to him, then planning is one of the factors making for decadence. We are, most of us, schoolboys at heart and, it must be admitted, it is very rarely that human beings have been willing to resist the temptation to apply a process, test an invention, employ a machine or exercise a power over nature. The Erewhonians broke up their machines because they considered that they had become a menace to humanity, and it is recorded—I know not on what authority—that the Chinese, having in the remote past invented gunpowder, passed legislation limiting its employment to fireworks. These, however, are the only examples known to me.

Our own world has carried the worship of machines to lengths not hitherto reached. This tendency receives its clearest expression in the two most advanced contemporary States, advanced in the sense that they look least to the past and point most clearly to the future, America and Russia.

For the *deus ex machina* of antiquity, these communities have quite literally substituted a *deus in machina*. An American will

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

show you his bathroom, a Muscovite the moving staircase in the Underground *before* he shows you anything else. In both countries it is taken for granted that the visitor to a new town must first be taken to see the "works", the implication being that what is important and what, therefore, is worth seeing, is not a picture or a statue or a library or a person, but lumps of metal performing their unmeaning revolutions.

As I have travelled across the great plains of Russia in search of a tool factory or a blast furnace, I wished that I had the courage to quote and my hosts the sensibility to understand that famous passage in *Hard Times* about the 'melancholy mad elephants', the first intimation in literature of a sensitive man's realization and fear of the implications of the machine age. Since Dickens's time the danger has grown a hundredfold, until today our civilization is in palpable danger and, indeed, bids fair to destroy itself, precisely because of its inability to refrain from using the powers which the machines have given it. Here, then, is another connecting link between the 'dropping of the object' and the fact of decadence.

### 3. CONCLUSION ON THE 'OBJECT' FOR COMMUNITIES

The question must now be considered what, in the sphere of social philosophy, fills the office which I have assigned to the 'object'? An answer suggests itself at two levels. At the first level the answer is, the goods upon which democracy lays stress. If the impulse to power as it expresses itself in the ambitions of able and vigorous men is not to be harmful to communities, it must be hedged around by restraints. These restraints are traditionally imposed by law and custom. Hence the making of a country's laws must be entrusted to men who are subject to scrutiny and supervision in the interests of those who are subject to the laws made. After all, it is only the wearer who knows where the shoe pinches, and it is right that those who wear the shoes should, in the last resort, be responsible for their cut and fit. This entails representative government with as a corollary the opportunity to eliminate and/or

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

supersede legislators who have ceased to use their powers in what the citizens consider to be their interests. It entails also the separation of the judiciary from the legislature, so that those who are responsible for administering the laws will not be biased by party or political interests.

What else is included within the content of the 'goods' of democracy? That the individual should be treated as an end in himself and not as raw material for manipulation by the State; that the State, in other words, should be the instrument of its citizens' purposes, instead of treating its citizens as the instrument of its purposes; that a sphere of conduct should be defined in which the individual should be free to act as he chooses without interference from external authority, and that this sphere should include the practice of religion, the carrying on of business, marrying and giving in marriage, the choice of one's amusements and the enjoyment of one's leisure, provided that such choice and enjoyment do not adversely affect other people, and that the individual should, therefore, subject always to this limitation, be free to pursue his happiness in such ways as seem good to him; that statesmen who seek to encroach upon this sphere, who do not, therefore, respect the rights or carry out the purposes of those who elected them and gave them power, should be removable by constitutional means and not only by resort to armed force; that men should be arrested only for offences prescribed by the law, that, when arrested, they should not be held in prison without trial and that their trial should be conducted by an independent bench of magistrates and not by a biased party or political court—these, the traditional 'goods' of democracy, constitute the most effective safeguards against the arbitrary use of power, and their maintenance and observance constitute the first level of what I have called the 'object' in the political sphere. These, then, are among the ends at which communities should aim, since, where they are achieved and observed, they constitute an independent and objective framework of checks and restraints to which the impulses of the power-seeking individual are subordinated. The establishment of such a framework of restraint is, then, an 'object' for communities.

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

### *'Objects' at the Second Level*

The answer at the second level is, those ends *for the sake of which* good government is exercised. In the foregoing discussion on planning, I found myself continually confronted with the questions, 'planning for what?', 'efficiency for what?', the presumption being that, unless some independent end was recognized as intrinsically valuable and worthy, therefore, to be pursued for its own sake, the planning itself tended to become an end.

### *Ethical Goods and Socialism*

The early Socialists were inspired by predominantly ethical concepts. They preached and strove and suffered primarily no doubt that men might be freed from economic slavery, but also in order that, so freed, they might live better lives than capitalism made possible for the workers, or even for their capitalist masters. Freedom from want and fear, the abolition of class distinctions and the establishment of equality between man and man—these things were good in themselves ; but they were also good as means to other goods, since, it was believed, the members of an equalitarian society, freed from social snobbery and the false prestige of wealth, would enjoy better and fuller lives than were possible to the stunted, the envious and the frustrated half-men upon whose labour capitalism battened. Admittedly, these conceptions were not very fully worked out, yet it is impossible to read the works of such men as Keir Hardie, William Morris or Edward Carpenter without realizing with what a strength of ethical conviction they were imbued. In a word, the driving force of the early Socialists was moral.

There was, they implied and, indeed, asserted an independent moral order in the universe. Its recognition by a community of free and secure men would express itself in discipline, voluntarily imposed and accepted ; in the assumption of responsibility for the performance of necessary work ; in the protection of the weak ; in the safeguarding of the rights and wishes of minorities ; in consideration for, even in love of one's neighbour ; in respect for the labourer and recognition of the dignity of his labour ; in

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

solidarity between men of the same class and outlook and particularly between men of the same class belonging to different nations, this last, entailing internationalism—were not all men, after all, brothers?—and pacificism—why should men between whom there was no personal enmity, why, above all, should the disinherited workers fight and kill their brothers?—in the reform, not the punishment, of criminals; in an industrial system which relied upon interest in and love of the work and not upon fear and competition to get the work done; in argument instead of force as the instrument of conversion and in persuasion and consent as the method of government.

All this was, no doubt, highly Utopian, though it seemed less so in the first decade of the twentieth century than it does today. Yet, looking back over the history of the socialist movement over the last thirty years, it is impossible not to regret that the reaction from this early Utopianism has led to so whole-hearted a banishment from the forefront of the socialist consciousness of the ethical concepts by which the early socialist movement was imbued. The world, no doubt, has a long way to travel yet before its practice squares with its professions. But the first step is for its professions to condemn its practices. This step, which seemed in a fair way to being taken forty years ago, has now been largely retraced.

### *The Case of Russia*

From this point of view socialist Russia is at once an object lesson and a warning. As others have pointed out, Russian Communism is in no sense the betrayal of an ethical creed, since its inspiration was never drawn from ethics. Based as it is on the assumptions of nineteenth-century materialism, Russian Communism makes no provision for the spiritual factor in man. Hence, when it came to power, it found, as it no doubt expected to find, that the incentives upon which the early socialists had taught men to rely, love and respect and co-operation, voluntary discipline and self-sacrificing service, did not work and was accordingly compelled to reintroduce those time-honoured imperatives, fear and force, snobbery and greed, traditionally employed by the governments it had replaced.

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

It is my opinion that any experiment in Socialism which omits to make provision for the existence and the needs of the spirit, will find itself similarly bereft of the advantages of those incentives whose operation alone makes the achievement of Socialism worth while. For, without them, Socialism will not mean a new world; it will mean only a redistribution of the spoils of the old one. It will not supersede the standards and values of the capitalist class; it will merely enable the workers to step into the capitalists' shoes in order that they may pursue the same values and live according to the same standards. It will not encourage men to lead a new life; it will only make it possible for more men to enjoy a vulgarized version of the old life.

Such, granted the triumph of the Left, will be the consequences of the neglect of the 'object' in the sphere of society. For the 'object' for society is not, in the last resort, other than the 'object' for individuals. For society, as for individuals, it is to be identified with those values to which reference has so frequently been made in this book, the neglect of which, as the argument has developed, increasingly exhibits itself as the constant factor in the many varieties of the 'decadent'.

*Note:* On reading through the above, it has occurred to me that the use of the indicative tense in the last paragraph may prove misleading. I do not mean that societies do, in fact, pursue the values with any greater degree of whole-heartedness and consistency than do individuals. In fact, their achievements in this respect are *less* notable than those of individuals. I mean, of course, that they *should* do so, since it is difficult to suppose that the ends of societies are in the last resort different from those of the individuals who compose them. But the fact that in the last resort the traditional values and they alone are to be regarded as the appropriate ends both for individuals and for societies does not mean that these are the 'objects' which societies do, in fact, pursue. On the contrary, wealth, power, and national greatness are, as I have argued in the preceding chapter, the normal 'objects' for societies.

What is more, these normal 'objects' act as stimuli to human effort and endeavour, exerting the characteristic effects of all directly conceived and passionately desired ends. In other words,

## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

they give a purpose to life, impart a vigour to action and an intensity to belief. Pursuing these 'objects' men live keen and vigorous lives and, though the 'objects' be false, those societies in which they are pursued, for example, the Fascist, Nazi and Communist States of our own time, are imbued by a great accession of vigour and confidence. False 'objects', then, can give men a faith no less than true and in the strength of that faith they act with the familiar confidence and vigour which are characteristic of non-decadent societies.

That the 'objects' are, nevertheless, false, may, I think, be deduced from two considerations. First, they are dividing and limited objects in the sense described above<sup>1</sup> and cannot, therefore, be universalized.

Secondly, men cannot pursue them indefinitely; they tire of power and conquest, as decadent aristocracies have tired in the past; they tire of the possession of wealth, as rich Americans are tiring today. Thus, as I have remarked in the preceding chapter, we see the second generation of descendants from the self-enriched man holding money as an 'object' of little account, growing sensitive, cultivating the arts and seeking in their personalities for ever new and more exquisite sensations. We see them, in a word, turning to experience as an end in itself. It is with this that in the preceding pages I have chiefly associated the conception of decadence. Hence, decadent societies which 'drop the object' tend after a time to succeed non-decadent societies which have vigorously pursued false 'objects'.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 326, 327.



## CHAPTER XIV

### Specialization and Decadence

#### 1. ON LARGENESS AND CENTRALIZATION

Specialization is connected with and is in part the product of centralization. In the centralized administration of a great State it is inevitable that men should perform functions which are both highly specialized and, because specialized, limited. There is also a strong tradition to the effect that highly centralized States are decadent. Hence, it may be that there is a connection between specialization and decadence. I propose in this chapter to try to trace the connection. Our own age has the reputation of being highly specialized. Hence, if a connection between decadence and specialization could be established, it would throw some light upon the question with which in Part II we are concerned, the question, namely, how far, in the light of the principles set out in Part I, our age may be justly regarded as decadent.

Let me begin with one or two preliminary remarks on centralization. It seems to be a conclusion of history that in over-centralized States life lacks zest. The late Roman Empire is often quoted as an example, but as early as the close of the first century A.D. we find—for example, in the letters of the younger Pliny—symptoms of administrative boredom. Pliny and his friends regard the business of government and administration as a burdensome routine to be discharged as an act of public service. Once it is over, and the sooner the better, a man retires into private life to cultivate the society of his friends and to edit the poets.

As time went on, the Roman State found it increasingly difficult to induce men to undertake the public service which Pliny and his friends still discharged from a sense of duty. Ultimately

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

compulsion was resorted to. Commercial associations were turned into hereditary castes and their members saddled with definite obligations to perform specific State services. It was inevitable that, as the spirit of voluntary service declined, the pressure of the State upon the individual should increase; inevitable, too, that, as the burden grew, it should crush such vestiges of the voluntary spirit as remained. The government imposed taxes which could be paid either in money or commodities in lieu of service; but they were increasingly evaded. The government seemed remote and impersonal, nor was it surprising that people should have felt little loyalty to a State in which they played no active part, or that they should have resorted to any and every shift to avoid the payment of taxes, the rendering of military or administrative service, or the performance of other social obligations. Thus, a vicious circle was set up; lack of zeal led to compulsion and repression which, in H. A. L. Fisher's words, 'converted peasants, traders and town councillors into the hereditary bondsmen of a servile State'. We are left with the impression of a vast and exceedingly complex machine, driven to provide for its own maintenance by the adoption of measures which increase in severity in proportion as public spirit declines.

That as the size of the political and administrative unit grows it *should* decline is understandable. Public zeal is displayed by those who feel interest and exert influence. For a man will be interested in a concern in proportion as he hopes to influence its policy and development. Thus, he will show an interest in the affairs of his tennis club where he may hope to secure election to a committee and to draw up a fixture list, when he will be comparatively indifferent to the fortunes of his political party which is too large to enable him to nourish even the illusion of influence. A man wants to know that he counts; to feel convinced that his wishes and desires can be made to matter. That such a conviction should not seem too obviously illusory is one of the conditions of an alert interest in public affairs. But when the size of the political unit is large, it is hard for men to entertain these feelings. In large centralized States the individual is apt to be assailed by a feeling of helplessness. He thinks of himself as a cog in a machine whose movements he cannot aspire to influence, a pawn in a game whose

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

course he is unable to direct, while the State itself seems often to be at the mercy of impersonal forces whose genesis escapes detection and whose workings evade control.

## 2. ON SMALLNESS, VIGOUR AND VERSATILITY

Conversely, one expects to find in comparatively small communities a vitality which expresses itself with equal vigour in public as in private affairs. Where do we look for robust personalities, pouring their overflowing energies with impartial exuberance into public service, private life, the practice of the arts and the conduct of business? We look to the small city-States. Above all, perhaps, we look to ancient Athens, where the famous speech which Thucydides puts into the mouth of Pericles celebrates both the public spirit and the personal preoccupations of the Athenians. I venture to quote a few sentences to remind the reader of the ideals both of public duty and private life, of politics and of art, that Pericles held before the citizens of Athens.

‘Our citizens attend both to public and private duties, and do not allow absorption in their own various affairs to interfere with their knowledge of the city’s. We differ from other States in regarding the man who holds aloof from public life not as “quiet” but as useless.’ ‘Yet ours is no work-a-day city only. No other provides so many recreations for the spirit—contests and sacrifices all the year round and beauty in our public buildings to cheer the heart and delight the eye day by day.’ ‘We are lovers of beauty without extravagance and lovers of wisdom without unmanliness.’ ‘As we give free play to all in our public life so we carry the same spirit into our daily relations with one another.’

Or we might look to the cities of the Low Countries where in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the spirit of emulation which spurred guilds of craftsmen to do their best work, the public encouragement given to writers and musicians, above all, the excellence and abundance of the Dutch and Flemish painters enabled the cities of Holland to vie in the vitality and achievement of their citizens with those of Renaissance Italy.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

### *The Renaissance Man*

For, in the last resort, it is to the latter that we must turn for the most fruitful exemplification of our theme. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a number of city-States on the Greek model, notably Florence and Genoa, Mantua and Milan, produced citizens who lived at a greater pitch of intensity and tension, life at a greater number of points than would now be thought either possible or desirable. To do so was a conscious ideal, the method of doing so a conscious study. Italy was, perhaps, of all places, the outstanding place, the fifteenth century of all times the outstanding time in which men made a cult of many-sidedness and elaborated a philosophy of versatility. The following quotation from Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* indicates the way in which this philosophy was applied in practice:

'The fifteenth century is above all that of the many-sided men. There is no biography which does not, besides the chief work of its hero, speak of other pursuits all passing beyond the limits of dilettantism. The Florentine merchant and statesman was often learned in both the classical languages; the most famous humanists read the ethics and politics of Aristotle to him and his sons; even the daughters of the house were highly educated. It is in these circles that private education was first treated seriously.

'An acute and practised eye,' Burckhardt goes on, 'might be able to trace, step by step, the increase in the number of complete men during the fifteenth century.'

'Whether,' he concludes, 'they had before them as a conscious object the harmonious development of their spiritual and material existence, is hard to say; but several of them attained it, so far as is consistent with the imperfection of all that is earthly.'

One expression of this versatility was to be found in the concept of the humanist, the man of letters who took all knowledge for his province and performed the duties of the civil servant in his spare time. 'The humanist,' says H. A. L. Fisher, in his chapter on the Italian Renaissance in *A History of Europe*, 'was orator, poet, scholar, teacher. The general would take him to the camp that he might deliver Ciceronian addresses to the troops: the government would employ him on solemn embassies, or to write

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

despatches, or to make public orations upon occasions of state; the prince would receive him in his castle as wit, instructor, librarian, companion; men and women of every rank crowded to his lectures, wept at his eloquence and lived upon his ideas'.

But the versatility of the age was not confined to the sphere of what we should now call humane learning, nor were the humanists of the fifteenth century content with the practices of the orator or the duties of the secretary or the civil servant. This age saw the first beginnings of science, not as an isolated pursuit but as a necessary addition to the legitimate preoccupations of the humane man. There were even those who combined the cultivation of both the arts and the sciences with the work of administration and the exercise of the functions of government, thus embracing in their thought and their acts the whole theory and practice of a 'liberal education'. The best-known example of Renaissance versatility is that of Leonardo da Vinci. Scientist and astronomer, architect, geologist and marine zoologist, Leonardo did not only theorize and investigate but constructed and applied. He also found time to paint some of the world's greatest pictures. Yet his is only the supreme example of a versatility whose development in other men of the time was scarcely less remarkable.

Burckhardt devotes a couple of pages to the talents and achievements of Alberti, athlete and horseman, composer and painter, architect, both theoretical, as a writer of textbooks and practising as a builder of churches, comic dramatist and prose writer. Alberti was also a good after-dinner speaker, a wit, and a connoisseur of food and wine. An exquisite in manners, he was both beau and æsthete; in the first capacity he was the glass of contemporary fashion; in the second a forerunner of the new sensibility to the beauty of natural scenery which came to its full development in the romantics of the nineteenth century. 'It need not be added', Burckhardt concludes, 'that an iron will pervaded and sustained his whole personality; like all the great men of the Renaissance, he said, "Men can do all things if they will".'

My concern in this brief sketch is to bring out three points: first, in these vigorous and versatile men, life was lived at a higher pitch of intensity than in most men at most times, higher certainly than in most men in our time.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

Secondly, the intensity of interest was not unconnected with the variety of interests, and the variety of interests enhanced the zest with which each was pursued. It was because they had so much energy, that they did so many things ; but it was also because their occupations and interests were so varied that they were able to attack them with such zeal and to pursue them with such gusto.

Thirdly, all the cases I have mentioned were those of men living in comparatively small communities which were also remarkable for the vigour of their social and political life. As a concluding comment, I venture to suggest that there would be a general agreement to the effect that whatever else these communities of individuals might or might not be, they were not decadent.

### 3. REASONS FOR THE VIGOUR AND VERSATILITY OF SMALL COMMUNITIES

Some of these are obvious.

#### *(a) That Variety Gives Zest*

If the community is not large its members may and probably will have to turn their hands to a number of jobs ; even if men are not obliged to versatility, they will not be frowned upon for being versatile ; for their society will have a use for versatile men. In the early Roman Republic Cincinnatus is taken from the plough to lead the armies because there are not enough good generals to go round ; when he is not fighting, he is at the plough because there are not enough farmers to go round. Socrates, the philosopher, fights in the Athenian army at Potidaea, because it is only if men belonging to every walk of life are prepared to serve, that the requisite number of hoplites can be maintained.

I have already referred to the many-sidedness of the citizens of the States of Renaissance Italy ; but that their versatility was at least as much a product of the smallness of their

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

communities as a characteristic of the *race* to which they belonged, our own history testifies. When England was small and sparsely populated, it was as natural for a man to do a number of different things and make a success of them, as it was for the single servant in the small Victorian household to be a 'maid of all work'. Thus, Sir Walter Raleigh, besides being an enterprising adventurer and explorer, is also a writer of exquisite and accomplished prose. Bacon was at once a philosopher, a statesman, an aphorist, an experimental scientist and, according to some views, a playwright. Cromwell's admiral, Blake, who was also a merchant, a Parliamentarian and a soldier, did not go aboard ship until he was past fifty.

It is, perhaps, in the statesmen of small communities that this versatility is most noticeable. Pericles was interested in philosophy, numbered Anaxagoras among his friends and was an ardent supporter of drama and the arts. In the eighteenth century statesmen conducted affairs of state concurrently with the administration of their estates. As late as the early nineteenth century Lord Melbourne could afford the time to play his part as a member of a highly cultivated and exacting society. Disraeli wrote novels and Lord Balfour at the end of the century was still writing philosophy. But with the twentieth century the statesman's task grows so exacting that I have heard a Cabinet Minister complain that he 'had read nothing for years except detective stories'. The implication would seem to be that it is no longer possible to be both a statesman and an educated man.

A zestful liver is, as I have already pointed out, one who touches life at many points. Conversely, a life devoted to the cultivation of a single sphere of interest is apt to be lacking in variety. For this reason, the specialized life in which a man performs duties is apt to be less zestful than the versatile life in which he pursues interests. For example, the man whose work-a-day interests are circumscribed by the requirements of a single job rests or relaxes when his job is done; the man whose energies are distributed among a variety of interests, however exacting, lays down one only to take up another. The tired politician takes up his detective story, the tired business man his illustrated paper; but the versatile man plays chess or climbs mountains.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

### *(b) That Small Communities are favourable to Original Art and Thought*

In a small community men know and meet one another ; hence, they are spurred by emulation to try to excel one another. As I have already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> most great work in literature or art is the product of a school, that is to say, of a number of men who share a common interest, exercise a common talent and are in continuous contact with one another for mutual encouragement and criticism. One thinks of the painters of Florence and Siena, of the musical world of the Bachs, of the group of writers and critics of the English Augustan age, of the French Encyclopædists. Now, when the community is very large, artists and writers are scattered and isolated. For example, in modern England the writer or the artist is an oasis in a desert of philistinism. Consequently, writers and artists either live lonely and unsatisfied lives, gather in self-defensive and self-glorifying cliques and *côteries* in order the better to sustain the pressure of their philistine environment, or merge themselves into their environment and become portrait painters, advertisement illustrators, popular song or comic verse writers, or the purveyors of saleable novels or short stories. The concept of the school, the school of artists or craftsmen, is illustrated in the Flemish cities of the fourteenth century, in the cities of the Hanseatic League, in the cities of the Italian Renaissance, or in the courts of the eighteenth-century German principalities, but it is not found in Megalopolis.

Now that the artist, the writer, the composer, the researcher or the scholar may so pursue his calling as to derive from it the full benefit of its ardours, its endeavours, and its raptures, realizing all that his calling has it in it to offer and all that he himself has it in him to be, it is necessary, as I have already argued,<sup>2</sup> that he should practise his art or his craft or follow his research in company with other like-minded men. Such, if history is any guide, is the recipe for the production of original works in art, for the conceiving of new thought in philosophy, in politics and in morals, for the conduct of fruitful research and experiment in science. Hence, it is no accident that those advances in thought,

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iii, pp. 85-7.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*



## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

in morals, in religion, in art and in invention, by reason of which mankind has chiefly advanced beyond the condition of the savage, should have originated in small communities.

These generalizations are, I think, borne out by our own history. In what do the distinctive contributions of the English people to civilization consist and whence do they spring? Are they connected with, do they derive from the accident of our lead in the industrial revolution and consequent increase in numbers and in wealth? I think not. The industrial revolution covered the North of England with the ugliest cities that have defaced nature and produced a philistine society that cared little for the things of the mind and the spirit. Are they, then, to be identified with the winning and governance of our Empire, the largest that the world has seen? Again I suggest not. There have been other empires in the world, and the holding down of subject people against their will, in India, for example, or in Burma, is neither politically desirable nor ethically admirable.

I suggest that the answer is to be found in our poetry and, more particularly, in our nature poetry, the loveliest and most abundant in any language; in the school of English music that flourished in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and notably in the works of Byrd and Purcell; in our elaboration of a certain way of life and, more particularly, of country life, involving such subsidiary pursuits as hunting and field sports and such subsidiary inventions as ham and eggs, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and roast lamb and mint sauce; above all, in our invention of free institutions and the development of Parliamentary government. It is in the initiation and bringing to perfection of these arts, pursuits, ways of conducting personal and of organizing collective life, that the genius of the English has received its most distinctive expression. Yet, while the industrial revolution and in large measure the Empire are the characteristic emanations of the overpopulated urban England of the last century and a half, the poetry and the music, the country way of life, the political institutions and the contributions to political thought proceed from the England of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when our population was less than seven million and most of us were living in small communities mainly

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

devoted to agricultural pursuits and imbued with a strong sense of locality.

### *(c) On Specialization and Non-Specialization in Education and their Respective Effects*

It was in seventeenth and eighteenth century England that what are known as the literary and humane studies were regarded as a necessary ingredient in, even when they did not constitute the sum of the education of the cultivated man. That this should have been so was no accident. One of the characteristic effects of the pursuit of the humane studies is the postponement of specialization. Study engineering, law, architecture, medicine or accountancy and by the age of twenty-three you will have at your disposal a definite body of agreed factual knowledge. You will also be the master of a certain number of known and definite techniques; in short, you will be already in embryo a specialist. Study classics and philosophy and you will have no such body of technical knowledge to your credit. But the specialized knowledge which prepares men for the professions I have mentioned, precisely because it is specialized, excludes other knowledge. It is acquired by means of selection and elimination, the selection of what is relevant to the chosen subject, the elimination of all that is not. Thus, a student of engineering will not easily find time to read Shakespeare, a medical student cannot afford to study history, or, indeed, one is sometimes tempted to think, anything else, while the synoptic view of man's life and thought in their cosmic setting which is now pursued by the specialized technique of philosophy but which is by nature proper to all men, is denied to the architect or the accountant. They may, indeed, speculate for themselves, but they will have lacked the opportunity to enlarge the scope and enrich the content of their speculations by an acquaintance with what great men have thought and said memorably about life. Thus, specialization in education limits and, the earlier the specialization is undertaken, the greater the limitation.

Conversely, the man who pursues the humane studies, such as literature and languages, history and philosophy, holds off the

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

time of specialization until the latest possible moment. Precisely because his mind is not limited by concentration on any single subject, it remains open and exposed to the fertilization of all the influences that may be brought to bear upon it. It is, therefore, at maturity a richer and a wider mind than that of the specialist. Two consequences follow: first, when it does come to specialize, it has greater resources to bring to the task. It is also a keener instrument, sharper and better tempered for the performance of any work for which it may be enlisted. The highly tempered mind as exemplified by the barrister getting up a brief, or the statesman mastering a report, is able to assimilate a mass of specialized knowledge, to make it its own, to use it for the purposes for which it has been acquired and then to disembarrass itself of it as quickly as possible. Secondly, such a mind may never, in any strict sense, become specialized at all; for though it may and does acquire knowledge for a special purpose, it usually contrives to lose it again. It does not, that is to say, go through life cumbered with a dead weight of massive, factual knowledge. The appropriate repository for factual knowledge is not a man's head but a Blue Book, a reference book, an encyclopædia or a card index, which, I take it, is what Oscar Wilde meant when he told us that the 'mind of the thoroughly well-informed man is a dreadful thing', and likened it to a 'bric-à-brac shop, all monsters and dust, with everything priced above its proper value'. The educated man is not so much the man who knows things as the man who knows where to turn for the knowledge which at any given moment he may happen to need, knows how to master it, to use it in the most effective way and then to get rid of it; just as the most sensitive and delicate tools are not those that do specialized jobs but those which make other tools to do specialized jobs.

Specialization is not, after all, natural to man who is pre-eminently a non-specialized animal. And because he is non-specialized, he is adaptable. The limbs of the animals are like tools; but many of man's limbs are analogous less to tools than to hafts to which may be fitted any one of a number of tools. For example, a man can fit his foot with skates or skis or roller skates or gum boots or snow boots or even stilts and so adapt himself to move over a number of different terrains. He can adjust

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

his foot to dancing with one kind of covering and to mountain climbing with another. The application of this principle to the hand is obvious. Similarly, a man's mind is not an instrument for knowing one kind of thing or applying its faculties in a single sphere, but for learning a variety of things, applying and making use of what it has learnt in a number of spheres and then turning its attention elsewhere.

Hence, I repeat, it is no accident that when communities have been small they should have valued liberality and humanity in study and versatility in life, just as it is no accident that when they have grown large and become centralized they should also have become specialized and should have concentrated their educational training upon technics rather than upon the humanities. In our own highly centralized and, therefore, highly specialized society the accomplishments of the all-round man, and in particular the graces of a richly cultivated, highly trained but non-specialized mind, are at a discount. These are valued in small communities precisely because in a small community a man may be required to turn his hand and mind to a number of different tasks. He also tends to be in more or less continuous contact with men differently trained, doing different jobs and pursuing techniques different from his own. He learns to share their interests and to understand something of their work, even, it may be, on occasion to take a hand in it himself. Consider, for example, the variety of the company which Dr. Johnson and his friends met at the five o'clock dinners which Sir Joshua Reynolds gave in Leicester Fields where statesmen, lawyers, churchmen, painters and men of letters were accustomed to scramble for their food and drink, where dons met Bohemians, and statesmen conversed with painters. In a word, small communities encourage all-round amateurism, whereas large ones encourage specialized professionalism.

### *Summary of the Foregoing*

It is, I am suggesting, to be expected that the concept of the variously educated man should have been formed in city-states in Athens and in Renaissance Italy. The concept has two

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

sides. First, it is deemed desirable that a man should take all knowledge for his province; secondly, that he should make his knowledge available for his fellows. For knowledge, on this view, is not an esoteric cult to be pursued only by the class of the academically initiated; it is the heritage of all men and it is, therefore, no less the privilege than the duty of those who have entered into it to introduce others to that which belongs to us all. I have already in the first chapter<sup>1</sup> cited the case of Erasmus of Rotterdam, who set himself to popularize no less than to acquire knowledge, in the conviction that all men should be made free of what had been thought and said by men of every country and culture. Erasmus, who has been called the first citizen of the modern world, was in fact the citizen of a small, independent, self-governing community. It is, however, to Vittorino da Feltre, who taught at Mantua during the first half of the fifteenth century, that we owe the conception of a *duty* laid upon the educated, an educational *oblige* as it were, to convey to others the knowledge which had hitherto been the province of the few; and not only knowledge in the strict sense of the word, but that whole cult of many-sidedness which characterized the age of the fifteenth century. Da Feltre was the first great schoolmaster. Fisher thus describes the man and his influence: 'He was a small, spare, gay man of a nature that seemed to be always laughing, a good horseman and gymnast, an indefatigable and devoted trainer of body, mind and character. . . . Among his posthumous disciples we may include . . . all our modern headmasters, so far as they seek to train mind and character through the instrument of fine literature, music and art, and combine with this generous curriculum a care for the development of the body.'

### 4. SOME REASONS FOR THE GROWTH OF SPECIALIZATION IN LARGE CENTRALIZED COMMUNITIES

These are in part the converse of those already considered under (3).

<sup>1</sup> See chapter i, p. 33.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

### *(a) Keeness of Competition*

In a large centralized community many individuals are available for the performance of most of the services that the community requires. There are few jobs for which there are not many applicants. Hence, if you would aspire to any particular job, you must excel in the profession to which it belongs, which means that, unless you are a specialist, you will be passed over in favour of others.

The modern examination affords a good example of this generalization. If he is to succeed in his chosen subject, the examinee cannot afford to gratify his curiosity in other subjects; if he is rash enough to do so, those who have been content to specialize in the chosen subject will beat him.

### *(b) The Growing Corpus of Knowledge*

The case of the examinee illustrates another point—large centralized communities are usually old and well-established communities. Being large and old they sustain a culture which is the product of many minds which have co-operated over a long period. In such societies the corpus of scholarship and learning will be impressive and the techniques of science highly developed. It follows that there will be a great deal of ground to traverse before a man can come abreast of the thought of his own time and master the ever-growing mass of technicalities with which particular subjects become invested. The theory and practice of medical science is a pre-eminent case in point. If he is to learn all that he must needs know to pass his examinations, a medical student cannot afford to study anything else. To take only one point where many might be mentioned, he is required to burden his memory with so large a number of relevant facts that he simply dare not take the risk of taxing his mind with any knowledge that is not germane to his immediate purpose, for fear lest it might crowd out some of the knowledge that is. Hence, during the years from eighteen to twenty-three which are the years of the great opening and flowering of the mind, the future doctor is precluded by the conditions governing the entry to his profession

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

from acquiring the interests and contracting the tastes of an educated man. For this, pre-eminently, is the period in a man's life when his future tastes and interests are formed and, unless his mind has the leisure and the opportunity to range over a fairly wide stretch of territory, he will not have the chance to discover those personally distinctive and individually appealing things which, whether they be music or painting or nature or books—and if books what kind of books—are fitted to satisfy the needs of his temperament and the demands of his intellect. For there are some things which a man is by nature peculiarly fitted to receive and, if he does not find them out early, he goes through life with mind and spirit impoverished by their lack. Deprived as a youth, the doctor remains limited as a man, for the arduous conditions of hospital and private practice preclude the chance of repairing, even if they encourage the desire to repair, the limitations which lack of an all-round education has imposed.

Much the same might be said of the education of the physicist, the chemist and the engineer, to cite three of the distinctive educational disciplines of our time. I have had frequent occasion in the foregoing pages to comment upon the absence in our time of a common culture expressing itself in a unity of thought and feeling, an agreed scale of values and a community of taste. That in the growing specialization of knowledge is to be found one of the reasons for this lack would, I think, be fairly generally agreed. In illustration, I quote one expression of view, where many could be given, from an article by Professor Bonamy Dobree which appeared in the Universities number of the *Political Quarterly* for September 1946. A couple of hundred years ago the British governing class constituted, he says, 'a homogeneous group bound together by the education which goes by the name of "the humanities"'. . . . Naturally, they agreed as to values, and their views were further cemented together by a universal, or almost universal, acceptance of the same Christian doctrine'. But this class, he comments, has been disintegrated 'from within by an increasing specialization of knowledge, which has shattered the unity of outlook and agreement as to values'.

*The Disappearance of the 'Educated Man'*. I imagine that Professor Dobree would agree that the eighteenth century was the

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

last period when it was possible to be an educated man in the sense of taking all learning for one's province and keeping abreast of the latest developments in every sphere of intellectual and artistic activity. Certainly the men of Dr. Johnson's circle, discussing with equal readiness and with no consciousness of amateurishness or suggestion of dilettantism philosophy, theology and physics, painting and poetry, music and drama, not to speak of politics and the art of government, give us the sense of moving with complete assurance in all their many spheres of interest. Men, of course, still discuss such things, but in so far as they are all-round men and discuss them all, they are outsiders, propounding theories of government without the experience of power, criticizing poetry and music which they do not produce and assessing the impact upon society of events in which they have played no part. With the men of Dr. Johnson's time it was not so. They did things as well as they talked about them. Hume is not only a philosopher, he is also the secretary to an ambassador who on occasion deputizes for his principal; Gibbon serves in the militia, enters Parliament and holds a post at the Board of Trade; Garrick is both producer and the first actor of his time; Halifax, in an earlier age, and Chesterfield are high Ministers of State as well as letter writers, practical philosophers and aphorists. It is this combination of action and thought, of practising and preaching, of producing and criticizing, this association of the practical work of government with the theoretical discussion of politics, that gives the men of the eighteenth century their sense and their solidity. They were all-round men touching life at many points and not, therefore, distorted by over-development at one. Moreover, having had personal experience of practical affairs, they were preserved from the intellectual excesses of the theoretician and the crank; there is nothing like doing a great many things to keep a man sane.

This age came to an end with the eighteenth century. Even as early as 1823 we find Goethe, who is one of its most typical as well as one of its most successful products, complaining to Eckermann that in former days 'lectures were read in chemistry and botany as belonging to medicine, and the physician could manage them. Now, both these have become so extensive that



## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

each of them requires a life ; yet acquaintance with both is expected from the physician. Nothing can come of this ; one thing must be neglected and forgotten for the sake of the other'.

Since Goethe's time the process of specialization and limitation has proceeded without any counteracting tendency. As late as the middle of the nineteenth century an educated man could still understand Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and Darwin's *Origin of Species*, though, as the controversies of the time show, many educated men could also misunderstand them ; but in the age of Jeans and Eddington and Haldane and Huxley the scientists have to write down to us in deliberately expository books, if we are to follow the general drift of contemporary work, and even then, as they assure us, we do not really understand what they are doing and saying, not, at least—or so they would imply—at the deeper levels. The writer who in our own time has been most successful in popularizing science by explaining the relation of science to affairs and so of making his contemporaries 'scientifically minded' is H. G. Wells. Wells performed in the highest sense the work of a *vulgarisateur*. It was not only science that he explained to common men but history and economics. He took all contemporary problems for his province and tried to show man's present relation to his past and to indicate his future, which he foresaw as a future of self-destruction unless he can learn to control his powers before it is too late. Wells performed a service for his times which exceeded that of almost all his contemporaries, yet to such an extent is our society enslaved to the concept of specialization that his educational work went academically unhonoured. An F.R.S. would surely have been appropriate ; it is difficult to see why he should not have been accorded an O.M. He did more to enlighten the mind and to dispel the ignorance of his contemporaries than any of those whom the State and the Universities delight to honour, while at the same time insisting upon the maintenance of a perspective which, taking all knowledge for its province, enables the student to grasp the interrelations between the different parts of knowledge.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

### (c) *The Growing Specialization of Art*

Specialization with its corollary, lack of comprehension of what is happening outside one's own sphere, is also characteristic of contemporary art. In the eighteenth century it would have been taken for granted that an educated man would understand even if he did not enjoy contemporary painting. In our own time one man pursues painting, another is an amateur of music, while much contemporary work in both spheres lies outside the educated layman's range of comprehension. The same, incidentally, is true of the great bulk of modern poetry.

*Specialization in the Public—the Picasso Exhibition.* The storm of criticism evoked by the exhibition in London of the pictures of Picasso and Matisse in the spring of 1946 affords a double illustration of the point I am here making. First, the public were bewildered and shocked by the pictures, because, having had neither the leisure nor the chance to learn, they knew nothing about art. Accordingly, they took it for granted: (i) that they were good natural judges of art and that anything they disliked must be bad (this is an example of the belief that good taste is natural and need not, therefore, be acquired which, in an earlier chapter, I have suggested to be distinctive of democracy);<sup>1</sup> (ii) that a painting must be like what they took to be 'life' and that, in so far as it departed from the sort of faithful representation which a coloured photograph exemplifies, it was bad art. This attitude proceeded from a lack of sophistication which went to the length of suggesting by implication that Picasso did not paint pictures which resembled objects because his technical ability was not sufficient to enable him to do so. People were even heard to conjecture that Picasso did not know how to *draw*.

This suggests a further point. It is not merely because their culture is more limited and they themselves more specialized that educated people today show less appreciation of contemporary art than their eighteenth-century predecessors; it is also because art is itself more specialized. Hence, men find it difficult not only because their taste is more elementary, but because art is more advanced.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xi, pp. 271–5.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

*And in the Artist.* There is, I suppose, a sense in which, as a culture grows old—and, I was about to add, decadent, but remembered that the question of the decadence of our society is ostensibly the theme of Part II, and I must not, therefore, beg it by implication—the more obvious combinations of sound and colour and form tend to get used up. Whether this is in fact the case, I am not competent to say;<sup>1</sup> I suspect that it is not and that each new civilization, approaching what I have called the 'object' from a fresh spiritual angle, finds an inexhaustible variety of new forms opening out before it. Something of this kind would seem to have occurred with the coming of Christianity into the world. Moreover, if the combinations are really used up and do not merely *appear* to be so to the stale and sophisticated eyes of the representatives of an old culture, one cannot avoid wondering what employment our remote descendants of a hundred thousand years hence will find for their creative faculty, what scope for fresh aesthetic enjoyment. It is hard to picture a world without art; harder, a world without literature; yet if all the patterns and the stories are used up, how one wonders, is either to go on? It is comforting at this point to reflect that if the general position adopted in this book is correct, what I have called the 'object' is infinite and that the combinations of patterns and forms in which it reveals itself are, therefore, presumably inexhaustible, even if the soul of man must from time to time pass through a new dark night and awaken to a new spiritual orientation, before he can apprehend and appreciate them.

However this may be, periods do seem to recur in the history of culture in which everything seems to have been said and thought; when all the possible combinations have been painted in all possible styles and all the harmonies of sound have been exhausted. Men felt themselves, one suspects, to be living in such a time at the end of the Classical era.

Our own age seems at times to be in similar condition. I confess to have been unable on occasion to refrain from remonstrating with composers who produce from piano or orchestra sounds which have seemed to me to be deliberately inharmonious. The

<sup>1</sup>But see the discussion of a parallel suggestion in regard to music, chapter viii, pp. 181, 182.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

composer thus challenged has invariably replied that there is no point in merely varying traditional patterns, that Mozart and Beethoven exhausted all the resources of the idioms in which they wrote, and that it is necessary to devise a fresh idiom if new musical ideas are to be conveyed. It may be that the drawings of Picasso bear witness to the same feeling of impatience with the old and a desire at all costs to exploit new veins. One can understand that a man may grow tired of producing the old effects in the old way and want to forge a new instrument for himself.

If this is so, the age in which we live presents the artist with two alternatives; to produce works in an accepted mode which is already outworn, or abruptly to break away and to produce something which is new and which, therefore, strikes his audience as offensive and subversive; in other words, he has the choice of plagiarizing or shocking.

If, like Picasso, he chooses to shock—and it is hard to see how a great artist can do otherwise—his work is bound to outrage his contemporaries. What is more, the more cultivated their taste, the more, that is to say, their education and training have accustomed them to the idioms of the older mode, the more violent will be their feelings of outrage.<sup>1</sup>

The fault will not be altogether theirs, for the determination to break away represents a narrowing of aim. 'Not beauty in all its forms,' says the artist, in effect, 'but beauty only in those forms in which it has not appeared before'. In this sense all deliberate new departures in art are also deliberate narrowings of art's scope narrowings, and, therefore, specializations.

I am suggesting, then, that in an old civilization the appreciation of art will be characterized not only by a specialization which narrows the taste of the consumer, but also by a specialization which restricts the scope of the producer.

### *(d) The Growing Specialization of Professional Work*

The considerations enumerated in (2) relative to the versatility of small communities suggest another converse in large. It is

<sup>1</sup> This, of course, does not apply to critics such as Roger Fry or Clive Bell, whose insight is sufficiently original to enable them to detect and rejoice in what is significant and new.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

possible in a small community to do many jobs because none of them is very exacting. The civil servant combines his work with the pursuits of the scholar, because administration is still in its infancy, or because the field of administration is not large and its problems are neither numerous nor complex. If you are the burgo-master of a small town, you will have less to do than if you are the Lord Mayor of London. Where there is neither unemployment nor health insurance, there are neither unemployment nor health insurance Acts to administer and it is easier to combine the work of the Ministries of Labour and of Health. Before the invention of plastics, the bulldozer and the grid, it was possible to be an architect, a civil and constructional engineer and an electrician.

We have already seen how, as the community's stock of knowledge increases, it is necessary for a man to confine his attention to one particular sphere in the realm of thought if he is to keep abreast of its development. The practical life of an over-centralized community offers a parallel in the sense that the scope of the jobs that have to be done is so large that a man has neither time nor opportunity to travel outside it. The governor of subject peoples, the police magistrate, the high civil servant, the member of Parliament, the professor—all these find the sheer bulk of their duties too oppressive to enable them to cultivate other interests or to flirt with other subjects, still less, to be at play with their own. Hence, while the specialized men of large over-centralized communities are serious and work hard, their lives lack gaiety and zest.

## 5. THE DEFECTS OF SPECIALIZATION

What are the objections to specialization? They may, I think, most conveniently be considered under three heads.

### *(a) Biological Objections to Specialization*

The first group of objections originates in the sphere of biology. It is often pointed out that man is the only non-specialized animal. The point is sometimes epigrammatically put by saying that he is

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

a specialist in non-specialization. It is for this reason that his species not only survives but develops.

But even the fact of our survival demands explanation, for man is, from the physical point of view, outstandingly ill-adapted to his environment. His body is soft, exposed and the prey of innumerable diseases. It is only by covering himself with the skins and furs of other animals that he can protect himself against the vagaries of the climate. His young are helpless over what, from the strictly biological point of view, is a disablingly long period. How, then, has he survived? By virtue of his adaptability which is the direct outcome of his non-specialization. There is scarcely a creature who does not excel man in respect of some physical characteristic; lions are stronger, horses and deer fleetier; the tortoise is longer lived, the seal and the salamander more inured to changes of temperature; the beaver is more industrious, the nightingale more melodious, the sheep more co-operative, while the ant runs the Corporate State better than the most efficient Fascist.

But the specialized limbs and functions by means of which the animals excel us in respect of speed or strength or co-operativeness or cunning render their possessors rigid and unadaptable. Alter the circumstances by a hair's breadth and the hoof, the paw and the antennae become useless. But the hand, which has no special aptitude for any one set of conditions, is useful over a very wide range of conditions precisely because, as I have already pointed out, its function is less that of a limb than of a haft to which a number of artificial limbs may be fitted.

As with the human hand, so also with the human intelligence. Though we are without the specialized limbs and organs of the animals and the insects, our intelligence enables us to invent artificial limbs to do duty for those we lack by nature, lifts and cranes to perform the function of arms, trains and motors to take the place of legs, aeroplanes to supply the place of wings. The substitute limbs illustrate one of the benefits of non-specialization; natural limbs cannot be dropped when circumstances change; artificial limbs can. Thus, the bird cannot disembarass himself of his wings or the horse of his long legs, when conditions are unsuitable for their use; but man lands his plane or parks his car

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

and gets out. These, then, are some of the reasons why the human species survived and developed while other creatures, more richly endowed in respect of some specialized function, have declined or remained stationary. A man who does many things will do none of them as well as an animal who does only one, but because they *are* many, he is enabled to adapt himself and to survive in circumstances in which the one will not serve.

*That Human Adaptability Diminishes with Urban Civilization.* As civilization develops, the virtues and uses of this specifically human attribute of adaptability tend to diminish, for highly-developed societies tend, as we have seen, to be specialized societies. So keen is the competition that to succeed in the struggle for a living demands a degree of skill which most men can achieve only in one sphere. Also, as I pointed out in the first chapter, large societies deliberately discourage their members from trying to excel in more than one sphere. To this circumstance may be attributed a certain lack of humanity which has often been noted in members of large and highly centralized societies. It may well be doubted if any of our contemporary great men have realized in their development and displayed in their activity so many of the distinctive characteristics of humanity, characteristics of mind, of body and of soul, as Alberti and Feltre, Castiglione and Leonardo. We may also doubt whether the life of the typical clerk or manual worker, the former a denizen of offices, knowing little of the processes of nature and very little of art, the latter a machine minder, knowing nothing of either nature or art, is as full and interesting as that of the Renaissance secretary or the Athenian artisan.

The men of smaller communities lived lives that were both richer and fuller than ours because they tended to perform a number of functions, though none of them performed so efficiently a single economic or social function as our contemporaries. But the efficient performance of a single function is, as we have seen, the prerogative of animals rather than of men, and the pre-eminent example of a society of co-operating units, each efficiently performing its own specialized function in the interests of an integrated whole is the society of termites.

*Passage of Men into Insects.* Man emerged, so the biologists

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

tell us, above the animal level through the cultivation of the virtues of non-specialization and adaptability. It sometimes seems as if he is progressing towards the condition of the insect, by reason of his increasing specialization and rigidity. Standing upon the escalator at Waterloo in the rush hour or upon the Portsmouth road on a fine Sunday evening, it is difficult not to be reminded of the ant run. The reflection that these are the places in which civilization has reached its apogee and illustrate conditions to which other civilizations less developed will tend to approximate, cannot but suggest the possibility that the condition of being human may be only an interlude in the progress of evolution from the beast to the insect.<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, true that if our sole *raison d'être* consists in performing our biological functions and satisfying our physical needs, the more we specialize, the better, for the more we specialize, the more we produce, and the more we produce the more comfortably we shall live, and, it may be, the more leisure we shall enjoy. But wealth, comfort and leisure are, with reservations in the case of the latter, the goods of the body, and to regard the efficient performance of our biological function and the efficient satisfaction of our physical needs as our *sole* ends is to presuppose that we are all bodies and only bodies. If it be conceded that men also have souls and are differentiated from all other creatures in respect of them, it follows that the specialization of function in which the insects excel is harmful, since in narrowing the life of the soul it diminishes what is distinctively human. It follows further that for man to approximate to the condition of insecthood is not an advance but a decline.

### *(b) Economic Objections to Specialization*

What is true of specialization from the point of view of biology is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of specialization from that of economics. As the former leads to precariousness in the organism, so does the latter in the community, and for the same reason, namely, that it renders the community rigid and unadaptable.

If a community lives by growing only cotton or oranges and the climate changes, the community must either learn to grow

<sup>1</sup> This suggestion will be developed in the next chapter. See pp. 389-94.



## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

other communities, seek to become largely self-sufficient and succeed in becoming so. Thus, the large market for manufactured British goods which the free trade ideal presupposed tends to contract as other countries develop their own manufacturing resources.

The general trend of the twentieth is away from the free trade world of the nineteenth century. The modern tendency is for nations to develop a regional rather than a global economy, both growing and making for themselves more of the things which they used to import and which, according to the ideal of the free trade world, they were right to import. As to what is best for mankind from the purely economic point of view, I am not competent to express an opinion, but from the point of view developed in this chapter it is clear that the regional as opposed to the global tendency should be welcomed. If there is no *necessary* reason why all the world's automobiles should be made in Detroit, all the world's fuel be pumped in Burma, Persia or Texas, all the world's wheat grown in Canada or Russia or the Argentine, there seem to me to be many good reasons why these commodities should be produced in a number of different places.

There are in fact two contrary tendencies at work in the world today. There is, first, the tendency to maximum economic specialization encouraged by the free trade ideal, pursued in the interests of cheapness and efficiency and fostered by the growing speed and capacity of modern transport. There is, secondly, the tendency for communities to be self-supporting, a tendency springing largely from political and nationalist considerations and fostered by the technical advances made by so-called backward nations. This latter tendency seems to me to be in itself desirable, whatever one may think of the motives which have, in fact, helped to foster it.

*Advantages of the Non-Specialized Economics of the Region.* It is undesirable for a community, as it is undesirable for a human being, to be poised upon a single pivot, undesirable not only for reasons of economic security, but undesirable also from the point of view of fulness and variety of individual life. Just as it is natural for primitive man to reap his crops, build his house, hunt his food and reproduce his species, turning from one activity to

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

another without any sense of strain, so, I should say, it is natural for a human community to comprise men of the greatest variety of types, agricultural and machine workers, clerks and engineers, professional men and artists, statesmen and writers, and for each class of worker to be able to turn from one of these activities to another according to the community's predominant need at the moment. I suggest, further, that it is more likely to number among its citizens men of many talents, tastes and trades if, instead of advancing along the road of economic specialization, it follows the examples of the City States of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy and cultivates a system of regional economy which aims at satisfying the majority of its consumer needs from its own resources. My argument here is, then, a double one; first, men tend to increase in respect of the specific attributes of humanity, in proportion as they do many things instead of specializing in one or two; secondly, they will be more likely to achieve versatility, in proportion as they live in self-sufficient communities which, precisely because they are not economically specialized, require the greatest variety of services from their members. Conversely, the free trade ideal with its emphasis on efficiency of production and specialization in producers militates against the growth of communities of fully developed human beings and promotes the growth of communities whose members approximate in their behaviour to that of animals and insects. I conclude that the specialist tendencies in the modern world are decadent tendencies.

### *(c) Objections to Scientific Specialization*

The case against scientific specialization is familiar and can be briefly stated. That science has already outrun the possibility of comprehension by the educated non-scientist would be generally agreed. What is not so commonly recognized is that many sciences are now outrunning the comprehension of the exponents of other sciences. The sciences are centrifugal; they radiate in different directions like the spokes of a wheel. The longer the radii, the greater, it is obvious, is the distance between them at the perimeter. If present conditions continue, a situation will arise

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

in which no scientist in any one sphere will understand the results achieved by scientists in other spheres, any more than they now understand the steps by which the results have been reached.

It is scarcely necessary to stress the undesirability of this situation or to point to the need for links between these increasingly divergent radii of scientific advance. In the absence of such links there can no longer be said to be a common culture, a common view of the universe and a common body of knowledge, issuing in common standards of taste, canons of judgement and codes of morals. The sphere of thought is thus increasingly subject to all the disabilities of the specialization upon which I have already animadverted in the spheres of biology and of economics. The fostering and conveying of a common culture has traditionally been regarded as the function of the humane studies and, more particularly, of philosophy which in the past has sought to comprehend the universe as a whole. It has been the aim of philosophy not to explore any particular sphere or department of what is, but to present a plan of the cosmos as a whole to the construction of which the moral intuitions of the plain man, the insight of the artist, the verdict of the historian and the testimony of the saint, no less than the results achieved by the special sciences, have contributed. Our outstanding need at the moment is for a clearing house of knowledge to which all the piecemeal acquisitions of the specialized disciplines of thought can be brought for pooling and assessment. In its absence men lack an intellectual perspective for the co-ordination, arrangement and assessment of the fragmentary information that reaches them from so many sources. This perspective it has in the past been the business of philosophy to provide.

Yet, as I shall try in a moment to show, it is precisely such a perspective or view of the world as a whole which, whether it be true or false, is integrated, unified and comprehensive, that the thinkers of our own time are unequipped to provide. For the task of providing this perspective can be undertaken only by those who have themselves achieved a substantial degree of intellectual and spiritual integration. Such integration demands in its turn, first, a conviction that there is an 'object', and, secondly, an ability to apprehend and a willingness to pursue it.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

These requirements are in our own time increasingly hard to satisfy.

### 6. GENERAL CRITICISM OF SPECIALIZATION

It is time to draw together the threads of these discussions and to relate them to the theme of this book.

#### *That the Natural Order Evokes only Specialized Responses*

To be human, I have argued, is to be essentially a non-specialized creature. It is, then, in the first place, to be capable of responding to a great variety of stimuli. The function of a specialized limb is essentially an activity of response to stimuli of a particular type which are correlated with particular needs. Thus, the foot has been developed in response to the need to walk and run, the stomach to the need to digest, the eye to the need to see, and so on.

These needs are physical and most, though not all of them, are felt by animals in common, the development of differences between species being in part due to the fact that they satisfy these common needs in different ways. Thus all creatures have a need to protect themselves from danger; the horse does it by speed and develops the hoof, the bird by flight and develops the wing, the lion by strength and develops the claw. These specialized limbs and activities are at once the instruments and the expressions of different ways of responding to physical stimuli and satisfying physical needs. To non-physical stimuli the animals are indifferent; the horse does not respond to beauty, the bird to fame or the lion to ambition. Three points emerge: the animals are specialized because they respond only to a limited class of stimuli, because each respond in a distinctive way to the stimuli to which most species are subject in common, and because they are indifferent to stimuli which lie outside the limited class. The same is true *mutatis mutandis* of the insects. Broadly, we may say that limbs are evolved and activities

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

appropriate to them developed as the result of a creature's awareness of a certain limited area of the given which falls wholly within the spheres of time and space.

The physical desires are also appropriate to, or as Plato would have put it, 'are set over against', certain categories of stimuli; hunger, thirst, and lust, for example, are evoked only by certain limited classes of happening. The desire to free and move the limbs is evoked by their forcible constriction, to sneeze by a tickling of our nostrils. The nearer our experiences are to those of the animals, the more specialized are the desires we feel, and the narrower the class of happenings which evokes them. An obvious example is afforded by the well-recognized distinction between love and lust. Love embraces a fairly wide area of the personality and, regarded in the light of a response to an 'object', the loved person, includes body, mind and spirit. Love takes cognizance, that is to say, of temperament and temper, of race and education; it may be attracted by a Christian name, fired by the turn of a head or the sound of a voice, and nourished by kinship of religious belief or literary taste, or by a shared pleasure in nature. Lust, on the other hand, is single-minded and serious; it admits of no distractions and looks only to one thing. More specialized as a response of the subject, lust is set over against a more limited 'object'. With love we pass from desire to emotion, or rather to emotion that both includes and transcends desire.

### *'Objects' of the Emotions and of the Intellectual 'Faculties'*

The 'objects' of the emotions also fall within a limited area of the given. They are usually, though not always, both temporal and spatial and over against each particular emotion there is set a different and differently limited 'object'. The same truth holds for the emotions as for the physical desires, the greater the degree in which a man is motivated by specialized emotions, the greater also is the degree in which his behaviour approximates to that of the animals. Panic, fear, jealousy and rage are obvious examples; conversely, the greater the degree in which a man's actions spring from emotions and desires which represent a number of

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

elements of his being, the greater the degree in which his activities may be regarded as distinctively human.

In turning from the emotions to the intellectual 'faculties', I am anxious to avoid the suggestion against which I have already done my best to guard in the discussion in chapter ix,<sup>1</sup> the suggestion, namely, that there *are* separate faculties or that in normal cases it is ever anything less than the whole self which is present in the responses we make or the operations we initiate. Thus, when I speak of memory or desire, I do not mean that a special faculty known as memory, or a special piece of the self, known as desire, is in operation, but that the whole self is engaged in remembering or desiring, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, that the whole self is expressing itself conatively or in recollection. (One of the difficulties attendant upon this discussion is, as I have already pointed out,<sup>2</sup> that our language is a 'faculty' language.)

So much having been said as to the sense in which I am using the misleading word 'faculty', I proceed to point out that the intellectual 'faculties' are also specialized in respect of their 'objects'. Each such 'faculty', that is to say, is the expression of a different kind of intellectual activity which is set over against a different kind of object; though in the case of the intellect, precisely because it is more recently developed and more distinctively human than the emotions and the desires, the distinction between the intellectual 'faculties' and the distinctions between the objects to which they are appropriate are less clear-cut. Even here, however, it is possible to distinguish greater and less degrees of specialization of intellectual activity; memory, for example, is distinctively set over against facts and figures, precision of observation, less highly specialized and more general, is appropriate to scientific experiment, while power of ratiocination, which is essentially the power of detecting relevant connections as, for example, in logic, in chess or in mathematics, and is the most general of the intellectual faculties, is set over against the whole sphere of abstract thought. As with the 'faculties', so with the 'interests of the mind'. The mind of the practical man who is versed in engineering is set over a different kind of 'object' from

<sup>1</sup> Chapter ix, pp. 208-13.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter ix, p. 213.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

that of the poet or the scholar; it is addressed, that is to say, to a different and more specialized section of what is. Similarly, within the sphere of the practical intellect the mind of the practical man who is versed in engineering is set over against a different sub-section of the same limited section from that of the mind of the practical man who is versed in wireless. With the exception of what I have called power of ratiocination, all the 'faculties' and interests I have mentioned give rise to activities embodying a greater or less degree of specialization, wherewith man responds to particular selected areas of the given. Most of the objects to which these specialized activities are the responses belong to what Plato called 'the world of becoming'; most of them, that is to say, are subject to time and space and even when, as in the case in which the properties of numbers are involved, they are not so subject, most men are concerned with the non-temporal, non-spatial objects which form the subject matter of mathematics as means rather than as ends. By this I mean that the engineer and the wireless mechanic make use of mathematics not because they are interested in the properties of numbers as such, but in order that they may the better manipulate and control objects which are within time and space. Such manipulation is, indeed, as I have argued,<sup>1</sup> a distinguishing characteristic of many contemporary men.

### *Where the Specialized Man is lacking*

Now, that a partial response to one's environment such as is entailed by the pursuit of specialized activities by a limited part of the self is, when continued over a long period, narrowing and, therefore, harmful will, I think, be fairly readily conceded. The proviso is, of course, important. We cannot, it is obvious, expect to react to life with every side of our being all the time, nor, when I praise versatility, commending the man who calls into activity first one faculty and then another as he turns rapidly from interest to interest, am I contending that we should try to do so. I am arguing merely that long continued activity along a certain line, calling for the display of some specialized faculty of

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiii, pp. 334, 335.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

mind or body or, even, as in the case of the actor, of temperament, is harmful, precisely because it leads sooner or later to an atrophy of the faculties and functions which are neglected.

The point is conceded readily enough in other connections. We know that if a man lies in bed for a long time he will be unable to walk when he gets up because the muscles of his legs have atrophied through lack of use; that the man whose desires are limited to the possession of gold is less than a full man because he is forgoing the satisfaction of many other desires; that the man whose relations with women are confined to the plane of lust and never rise to that of love is missing much that the lover enjoys, and we pity the non-walker, the miser and the exclusive sensualist accordingly. And if we ask ourselves upon what our pity is based, we answer that it springs from our instinctive recognition of the fact that none of these men is getting out of life all that it has to give, because he is touching life at so few points. We most of us function only with a part of ourselves, but his part is smaller than the average; few of us live out to the full scope and extent of our being, but his scope is more restricted than ours. Hence, these seem to us to be mutilated men, just as men lacking arms or eyes are mutilated, since they are atrophied in respect of some of the powers and functions that are proper to normal men.

All this most of us would, I say, concede. What is not so willingly recognized is that the same is true in its degree of the specialized activity of a man permanently concerned with the narrow range of intellectual interests of the scientist, who has no interest outside his science and exhibits the mentality of a child in politics, or of the politician who has no time for books or music or nature and, when it comes to reading, is content with a detective story, no less than of the accountant or the clerk who has never been anything but an accountant or a clerk, so that when his day's work is done he has no resource except to potter in the garden, tinker with the wireless, or take the wife to the cinema. These, too, in their degree are men who, by dint of long concentration in a narrow sphere have become atrophied in respect of some of the functions and activities which we recognize to be appropriate to the fully developed human being.



## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

### *Conclusion and Return to Theme of Book*

In order to indicate the relevance of the foregoing discussion to my main theme, I venture to refer to the conclusions of preceding discussions and, more particularly, of two. The first is the discussion in chapter vi<sup>1</sup> which sought to bring out as the distinguishing capacity of human beings the ability to be aware of 'objects' which are not visibly present to them in space or temporally present to them in time. The second is the discussion of the nature of the 'faculties', in chapter ix, as the result of which I suggested: (i) that though the division of the soul into parts and of the psyche into faculties is invalid, nevertheless (ii) there is a sense in which a man can be said to function as an integrated whole as distinct from the occasions when he is functioning as less than a whole,<sup>2</sup> as, for example, when he is exclusively desiring or dreading; (iii) that wholeness of response and, therefore, integration of personality are evoked and fostered by the awareness and the pursuit of non-spatial, non-temporal entities which I later identified with values and to which, throughout most of this book, I have referred as the 'object'.<sup>3</sup>

It would seem to follow, first, that the degree to which men concede in theory the existence of 'the object' and seek to know and pursue it is also the degree of their integration; secondly, that in proportion as they are over-specialized they will tend to neglect those activities which bring the mind and soul into contact with 'the object', and will be disposed to reject theories which assert its existence.

If this conclusion is correct, it is no accident, (i) that the members of highly centralized communities who, as we have seen, tend to follow highly specialized occupations, should be prone to metaphysical and theological scepticism; (ii) that they should adopt a subjectivist analysis of metaphysical, moral and aesthetic judgements; (iii) that they should be non-versatile men reacting to life with arbitrarily selected aspects of themselves and, as a result, suffering atrophy in respect of others.

In sum, I am arguing that it is only where there is a general aware-

<sup>1</sup> See chapter vi, pp. 131-7.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter ix, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter ix, pp. 208-13.

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

ness of the 'object' coupled with a willingness to embrace a view of the universe which is prepared to accept it as independently real and not to analyse it away on subjectivist lines that men (i) react as integrated wholes to the universe conceived as a whole, and (ii) precisely because they are integrated, touch life at a large number of different points. Thus, versatility in living goes with affirmation in believing, and those who have believed in the objective significance of art, in the independent reality of goodness and the validity of morals, and, I should add, in a purposive mind as the creator and sustainer of the universe, will in general be found to have lived full and varied lives. (I am, of course, speaking here only in wide general terms; there are no doubt innumerable exceptions in either direction.) It remains to indicate the relation of this conclusion to the considerations touching the development of society with which this chapter began. I have argued that in small communities versatility is easier to achieve because men's services are demanded in a variety of fields; also because small communities tend to be formed during the earlier phases of a civilization-culture, before the arts and sciences have had time to develop traditions and disciplines which are at once so specialized and so technical that a man can only master one of them.

I have argued, then, that it is no accident that the men of ancient Athens and Renaissance Italy were artists and statesmen, philosophers and scientists, and that within the sphere of the arts they were practitioners of more than one. As one runs through the names of the great Florentines who were born or were working in Florence during the last half of the fifteenth century, Michelangelo, Donatello, Fra Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Leonardo, Ghirlandajo, Perugino and della Robbia in the sphere of the arts, Machiavelli, the political theorist, Guicciardini the historian and Ficino and Politian, the scholars, not to speak of Lorenzo dei Medici himself, poet and virtuoso as well as statesman, and reflects that all these men were the products of a small community, it is difficult to avoid the further reflection that it is only in a comparatively small community that such men *could* have developed their many talents, lived their versatile lives and as a consequence fully realized all that they had it in them to be.

---

## SPECIALIZATION AND DECADENCE

If I am also right in supposing that a certain degree of versatility of life and activity is a condition of the disposition to accept in theory and the ability to pursue in practice what I have called the 'object', it follows that men will be more likely in small communities than in large ones to adopt an integrated view of the universe as a whole, and in particular to achieve a recognition of a non-human order which man may know and to which he may aspire, but to which in his present state of being he cannot wholly belong.

Thus, two divergent patterns of individual and social life here present themselves. On the one hand are small communities characterized by versatility in practice, acceptance of the objectivity of values in theory and a willingness and a capacity to exhibit that response to the universe considered as a whole which we know most familiarly as religion. This is a development in the direction of ever more fully realized humanity. On the other hand are large centralized communities, characterized by specialization of function, narrowness of interest, a subjectivist view of art, morals and religion, deriving from and at the same time encouraging a 'dropping of the object', and a resultant concentration on the importance of experience for its own sake coupled with an affirmation of the supreme value of the human. In spite of this affirmation, this development is away from fully realized humanity in the direction of the more specialized life of the animals and the insects.

## CHAPTER XV

### Speculations

#### 1. DESTRUCTION IN WAR

In this last chapter I propose to glance at some possibilities for the future. It is, I think, clear from the foregoing analysis that our civilization is in many respects a decadent one within the meaning of the definition propounded in Part I. What, then, it may be asked, are the prospects of a decadent society? One which is obvious can be briefly discussed; it is that of destruction in war. The position in this respect can be most conveniently stated in a series of propositions. First, the countries of Europe have never within the period of recorded history contrived to pass half a century without war. There seems to be no reason to suppose that there reside in this generation certain distinctive virtues, the virtues of wisdom, humanity, compassion and reasonableness and good sense, which are at once so unique and so outstanding, that they will guarantee their possessors against a repetition in the future of the scourge that has afflicted Europe in the past. As distance contracts and the world increasingly becomes a whole, a conflict which breaks out anywhere tends to spread everywhere. There is, thus, little reason to doubt that a war in Europe will spread to America; perhaps, also, into Asia.

The power of modern weapons seems to be such that no densely populated community can survive another war. Before the last war gloomy prognostications were made. It was said, for example, that the effect of the bombing aeroplane would be such as to render civilized life in urban communities impossible. At first, it seemed that this view was unduly pessimistic. London, for example, was badly bombed, yet the general tenor of men's lives was less affected than might have been supposed. Yet by the end of the war the prognostications of the prophets had been fulfilled,

## SPECULATIONS

for who, looking at Mainz or Cologne or Coblenz today, would maintain that these cities contain civilized communities or, indeed, that they are ever likely to do so again?

The possibilities of atomic energy are still largely unexplored. It seems, however, reasonably certain that the power of destruction which its release will place in the hands of mankind will vastly exceed what has been known hitherto. It is reasonable, then, to expect that a fleet of atomic rockets launched against a densely populated country such as our own, where people are gathered in large urban agglomerations, will not only kill very large numbers, but will make the conditions of civilized life impossible for those who remain.

As I write,<sup>1</sup> the papers are discussing 'the spraying of radioactive matter'. The production of such matter is already in contemplation. It is described as 'a by-product of the atomic bomb', and 'sprayed from the air', Professor Oliphant informs us, 'could kill every living thing over thousands of square miles'.

It may be said that the threat which these developments constitute for England or Belgium or Holland applies with much less force to countries like Russia and America with vast and comparatively sparsely populated hinterlands. This is, no doubt, true; it is also true that the advance of science does not stop, nor does it appear to be stoppable. Indeed, it is hard to believe that in the next hundred years its achievements will be less sensational than they have been in the last. Who can doubt that in such a struggle for supremacy between these two countries as must surely precede the establishment of world domination by either of them, a struggle conducted with the weapons of fifty or a hundred years hence, a considerable part of the fabric of civilized life will disappear? As I have already suggested, the logical end of the journey upon which applied physics is engaged is the destruction by the pressure of a single finger upon a switch, of a whole army corps of healthy and vigorous men.<sup>2</sup>

It follows that the disappearance of what we know as Western European civilization within the next century seems to be a not improbable contingency.

<sup>1</sup> May 1946.

<sup>2</sup> p. 332.

## SPECULATIONS

### *Return to the Theme of Decadence*

How far does the fact that such a possibility, nay more, that such a probability, must be seriously taken into account, convict the civilization to which it applies of being decadent? In any obvious sense, not at all. As I pointed out in the early chapters, it is young and barbarous rather than old and decadent societies which throughout history have been the chief agents of destruction and it might plausibly be urged that the transfer of power from Europe to the great powers which lie to the west and to the east is merely a new version of the frequently recurring pattern of history which shows the barbarians breaking in upon an effete civilization. Now, the barbarians who break in cannot in any ordinary sense of the word be called decadent, even though the term might appropriately be applied to the societies they destroy.

The position today is, however, more complex, nor does it except on the surface conform to the pattern of history. For since the cultural and technical invasion of Europe by America between the two wars, there is now little radical difference between the civilization of Western Europe and that of America, and though Russian civilization differs in important respects, these are not always the respects in which a backward people differs from an advanced. In some respects, indeed, for example, in its attitude to science, its emphasis upon and worship of machines, its technique of planning its social resources and its economic system, Russia is the most advanced not the most backward of communities, and may well be the model to which the rest of the world will increasingly approximate.

### *The Disparity between Wisdom and Power*

There is, however, another and, I think, a deeper sense in which the concept of decadence, as developed in this book, may be applied to our civilization, both as it is now and as it seems likely to develop in the future.

The distinctive characteristic of our civilization is the contrast between man's wisdom and his power or, if the phrase be preferred, between his ethics and politics on the one hand and his

## SPECULATIONS

science on the other. Science gives us a mastery of means but tells us nothing of ends. Hence, science is ethically neutral. Its effect is to enable men to gratify their desires and to further their purposes.

The future, then, depends, it is obvious, upon the uses to which the powers which science gives are put. These uses are determined by the ends which men value. Insight into and knowledge of ends are the concern of ethics and politics, the former prescribing the good life for man, the latter the good life for man in society. Now in respect of our ethics and our politics we have advanced very little since the days of the Greeks; in science we have immeasurably outstripped them. (It is no accident, by the way, that the student of Aristotle at Oxford, though required to master his works on ethics and politics, is not expected to make himself acquainted with Aristotle's treatises on biology, astronomy and physics. The inference is obvious; in the latter group of subjects Aristotle has nothing to teach us; in the former, much.) Hence arises the differentiating characteristic of our civilization, namely, the disparity between our mastery of means and our ignorance of ends or, as I have put it above, between our power and our wisdom. The former grows apace, the latter remains stationary. Of this disparity the atomic bomb is only the latest expression. It is, indeed, impossible not to contrast men's patience and profundity in research, their skill and ingenuity in the application of the results of research to achieve that mastery of matter which the release of atomic energy symbolizes, with the purposes to which the mastery has been put in the past and seems all too likely again to be put in the future. The former suggest a race of supermen; the latter of schoolboys or savages. For in their relations to one another the ends which States pursue are still very largely those which are appropriate to schoolboys and savages. Hence, it is not necessary to suggest that man is worse than he has ever been to indicate the danger of destruction in which his civilization stands; it is sufficient to point to the need that he should be very much better, precisely because he is so very much more powerful.

If the thesis propounded in this book has any validity, the ends of which, I am suggesting, our generation has shown a peculiar neglect are the traditional ends of human aspiration and endeavour, namely, truth, goodness and beauty and their derivatives,

## SPECULATIONS

as expressed in the practice of the ethical and political virtues, in art and literature, and in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, irrespective of its use and application. These ends and the various forms of their expression have in the foregoing exposition filled the rôle of what I have called the 'object', and it is in the 'dropping of the object' that I have found one of the distinctive characteristics of decadent civilizations. Hence, in terms of the formula which I have sought to elaborate, our society is in respect of its ignorance or neglect of these ends justly to be regarded as decadent. It is, indeed, precisely in its insistence that reality is all of a piece and all on a level, the level for the exploration of which science is the appropriate instrument, and in its refusal to recognize the existence of a deeper level of non-human reality which includes value and, it may be, deity, which the spirit of man may recognize and revere, but to which it cannot in this life aspire to belong—it is, I say, precisely in respect of this insistence and refusal that our civilization exhibits itself as decadent. The danger in which it now admittedly stands of self-destruction is only the outward sign and by-product of this decadence.

## 2. ADVANCE TO INSECTHOOD

Assuming that self-destruction is avoided, another possibility, which may even be a probability, is the advance of humanity towards insecthood. This is a theme upon which I have already touched;<sup>1</sup> having recently read Caryl T. Haskins's book, *Of Ants and Men*, I make no apology for returning to it. It is, indeed, difficult not to be struck by the many instances which Mr. Haskins gives of the approximation of our civilization to that of the ants. It is not merely that the growth and development of ant communities in the past has paralleled our own so closely that their societies seem, like ours, to pass through the same cycles and phases, in which the nomadic is succeeded by the agricultural, and the agricultural by the highly centralized industrial State. These parallels between ants and men do, indeed, hold, but they have always held. What is peculiarly reminiscent of our age is the impression of apparent pointlessness that termite societies evoke.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiv, pp. 370, 371.



## SPECULATIONS

Life, it seems, is very grim, it is, indeed, full of effort and endeavour, but it is also helpless and objectless, and the individual is condemned by the conditions of his existence to perform with never varying efficiency operations of never varying monotony which conduce to no end except the continued performance of similar operations in the future.

That is the impression which a termite society makes; it is also increasingly the impression engendered by our own. The reason for this distinctive parallelism between a highly centralized, highly mechanized society and the communities of ants is to be found in the special nature of the occupations which have been imposed upon industrial man by his dependence upon machines.

Characteristics of insects are uniformity of activity and specialization of function. I have already<sup>1</sup> emphasized the extent to which these are increasingly the characteristics of human beings. The typical employment of the contemporary world is that of the machine minder. The distinctive characteristic of the machine minder's job is the continuous repetition of the same operations. Variability and adaptability, which are the distinguishing characteristics of human beings, are reduced to a minimum, and as the machines increase in scope and competence, the distinctively human qualities demanded of those who tend them diminish in importance. It is not, therefore, surprising that those who devote an increasing amount of their lives to attendance upon machines should be diminished in respect of their distinctively human qualities.

These tendencies can be seen at work not only in the transfer of an ever-increasing amount of human activity from the non-industrial to the industrial sphere, but also within the confines of the industrial sphere. As machines become more powerful and elaborate, they usurp an ever wider area of human function. The first industrial revolution introduced machines whose operation demanded some skill of their operatives; the miner, the turner, the fitter, the foundry-worker, was each a master in his special line. It also concentrated workers in comparatively small units. The mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire, for example, were often family concerns. Later developments have had the effect of reducing the operative to the status of a mere tender of machines;

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiv, pp. 360-8.

## SPECULATIONS

they have also assembled operatives in ever larger and, therefore, more impersonal concerns. The effects of these changes can be seen in the difference between a typical miner from South Wales, weaver from Bradford, or foundry-worker from Middlesbrough and a typical light industry worker from Coventry. The former has still some pride in his job and some feeling of loyalty to his mates and the concern. The latter has little skill and no pride in his job and no feeling of loyalty to an organization which gives him no sense of personal participation or responsibility.

It is the more unfortunate that the early phases of the industrial revolution should have so completely devastated the areas which they affected. The industrial workers of Lancashire and Yorkshire and Durham live all too often in insanitary houses in hideous towns; their work, though skilled, is often disagreeable and arduous and, compared with the modern light industry worker, they are badly paid. Hence, there is a natural tendency, particularly marked in the younger men and women, to transfer from the type of industry characteristic of the earlier phases of the industrial revolution to industries of the later twentieth-century type. This entails a transfer from the work which is more skilled to that which is less, from work which is less to that which is more dependent upon machines, from work which is less dehumanizing to that which is more.

### *Machines and Leisure*

But machines are not only the instruments of our livelihood; they also provide the alleviations of our leisure. In this second relation we are become no less dependent upon them than in the first. The use of the motor car affords a good illustration of this generalization. Initially it conferred benefits upon human beings, increasing their speed and range of movement and so enabling those who worked in the town to live at a distance from their work. With the development of motoring, however, these benefits have been nullified. In the centres of our large cities where civilization has proceeded furthest and motors are most numerous, the speed of the foot passenger is already equal if not greater, while, as the city grows out to the full extent of the radius of the

## SPECULATIONS

new area of accessibility which the car has rendered possible, the would-be city escaper finds the country as far removed in point of time and space as it was from his grandfather, who had to walk his four or five miles in order to reach it on foot.

§ \*The car affords only a special example of a more general enslavement. For years we lived unaware of our chains; when at last consciousness of our predicament dawns—and this, in the case of cars, has already begun to happen—we find that it is too late to emancipate ourselves from our slavery. For all masters sooner or later grow dependent on their slaves and it has now become a psychological, no less than a physical impossibility for those who wish to divert their leisure to dispense with the aid of machines. To crowd through clicking turnstiles, to press buttons, to watch photographs move and sing, to turn the knob or the wheel, or to pull the lever—these constitute for increasing numbers of us the ideal of leisure using. As the machines take over an ever larger share of the task of production, they will leave us an ever larger amount of leisure in which to rivet more securely the chains of our dependence upon us, so that the citizen of the future, assured of comfort and a competence in return for three or four hours' machine-minding a day, will, if present tendencies are a trustworthy indication, increasingly delegate to machines the business of entertaining him during the remaining ten or twelve. It was, no doubt, a development of this kind that Samuel Butler had in mind when he represented the machines as the next level of evolutionary development, suggesting that just as man, whom the animals had evolved, had enslaved and supplanted his progenitor, so the machines which man has evolved will enslave and supplant man. Nobody supposes that Butler's fancy was meant to be seriously taken. It is no more than the logical development of the implications of his realization of the extent to which the conditions of modern life make for dependence upon machines.

As he looks at the contemporary world, the reader of Butler's allegory is struck by its sinister appositeness. He cannot help noticing how, while the machines which do our work for us stamp upon our work some of their own characteristics, their soullessness, their regularity, their uniformity, the machines which organize our play for us impose the same characteristics upon our pleasures.

## SPECULATIONS

If he adds work and play together, he will find it hard to avoid the conclusion that in imposing upon increasing numbers of human beings the necessity of performing the same activities at the same time, modern conditions impose also an increasing similarity between communities of human beings and communities of insects.

This general resemblance will be touched off by a hundred incidental similitudes, by a crowd at a football match, by workers clocking into or streaming out of a factory, or commuters crossing London Bridge on the way to their offices in the morning or their homes in the evening, by cars following one another on a fine Sunday evening along the ant runs of the Brighton or the Portsmouth roads, by a queue of housewives or a squad of A.T.S., above all, perhaps, by a line of motor cyclists, helmeted and goggled, roaring through a town, or a lorry decanting its sinister contents of armed soldiers or gangsters in its street. In a word, modern civilization comes increasingly to remind the observer of the scenes in Karel Capek's *The Insect Play*. This is particularly true of the resemblance between a world at war, between the conditions to which war gives rise and the scenes that war stages and the last act of the play, which depicts the war of the ants.

Now, all these developments are comparatively new; they are characteristics which are not common to men at all times but are *distinctive* of our time.

### *Common Pleasures and Individual*

It seems to be a rule that the conditions which favour the development of men in the mass are unfavourable to the development of man as an individual. Mass production and mass advertisement are directed to the lowest common denominator of need just as mass entertainment aims at the lowest common denominator of pleasure. Now, the lowest common denominators of need and pleasure derive from those factors in human nature that we all possess in common as men, not from those that distinguish us as individuals. Roughly they are the wants and pleasures of the senses, food and drink and sex, the expressions and pleasures of the more familiar emotions, combativeness, acquisitiveness, jealousy, greed and envy, and the thrills attending

## SPECULATIONS

some of the more obvious sensations, for example, the sensation of speed. But a man's taste for the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, his preference for the music of Mozart over the music of Tschaikowsky, his delight in the taste of Brie cheese, his feeling for the line of a down seen against a sunset sky, his habit of reading *Pepys's Diary* in bed, his moments of communion with a spiritual reality beyond himself, his liking for mountains, the pleasure which he takes in sitting in the sunlight beside a herbaceous border on an evening in spring—these things which are peculiar to each of us and may in their forms of expression well be different in all of us cannot be catered for in bulk by commercial agencies. Hence, the growth of conditions favourable to the establishment of agencies catering for the needs, the emotions and the pleasures of masses of men is inimical to the development of different and distinguishing tastes.

### *The Case of Natural Beauty*

To the contemporary destruction of natural beauty in England I have already referred.<sup>1</sup> If I do so again, it is because it affords so apposite an illustration of my present theme. The English countryside, all are agreed, is a unique blend of the work of nature and of man; a blend of quite peculiar charm and grace. It has inspired the loveliest nature poetry in the world and has been the source in many individuals of some of their most memorable and cherished experiences. Moreover, our feelings for the country are, we feel assured, peculiarly our own. Now we must, I think, resign ourselves to the fact that this countryside is largely doomed. The work of defacement and destruction which the machines have been carrying out for the last fifty years will ultimately be completed and Southern England will become a single suburb sprawling from Hitchin to the coast.<sup>2</sup>

If Nature ceases to arouse the emotions peculiar to herself, we can only suppose that these emotions will no longer find expression in verbal and pictorial beauty. It is, indeed, hard to believe that the poetry which the beauty of nature has inspired will

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xi, pp. 262–4.

<sup>2</sup> I have given reasons for what here appears as a dogmatic opinion in *The Untutored Townsman's Invasion of the Countryside*.

## SPECULATIONS

continue when the poets have no longer roots in the earth. It is, of course, conceivable that they may find inspiration for verse of equal beauty in the machines themselves, discovering in bulldozers and gyrotillers a substitute for trees; in cone-clutches and open cast coal works, for blossom and meadows; in cement mixers and caterpillar tractors, for birds and bees and fishes. Yet, while conceding that my incredulousness may be a non-significant by-product of time and circumstance, I do not believe that the poetry which the searchlight evokes will have the same aesthetic value as that which moonlight and starlight have inspired, or that the 'entrails' of a car under repair will prove as fruitful a source of aesthetic delight as a scatter of bluebells round the bole of an oak in spring.

The case of natural beauty is only a particular illustration of my general theme. This is threefold:

(i) the sights and sounds and pleasures connected with machines are increasingly superseding those arising from nature;

(ii) the former can be provided at will and will increasingly be so provided, as more people come to depend upon and to delight in them;

(iii) they appeal to what is common in man and not to what is individual and distinguishing.

This, I take it, is what Flaubert meant when he said that '*A mesure que l'humanité se perfectionne l'homme se dégrade*'. It will not, I think, in view of what has previously been said, be necessary here to emphasize the point that the substitution of the goods and pleasures of the machines which are common for those of the spirit which are individual exemplifies the 'dropping of the object'. For such substitution testifies at once to a neglect of ends and a preoccupation with the means which have brought about the neglect.

## 3. POSSIBLE REVIVAL OF MYSTICISM

Let us suppose that the condition of insecthood as the ultimate expression of the 'dropping of the object' becomes increasingly the condition of mankind; the question may be raised, will any be exempt? The question is important because, granted a growing approximation to insecthood, upon the answer we give to it will

## SPECULATIONS

depend whether our civilization, having reached its ultimate decadence, will be superseded by another, or whether, like that of the insects themselves, it will continue unchanged for an indefinite period. For if it is to be superseded by another, some must survive to hand on to posterity what was valuable in the traditions of the civilization that has been lost, as, during the Dark Ages, the monks kept alive a knowledge of the culture of Greece and the standards of Rome.

The question cannot, however, be answered unless we make certain assumptions, and the answer will differ according to the assumptions we make. Let us, then, consider it in the light of some of those which are current in our own time.

### *(a) If Materialism is True*

If the universe is mindless and purposeless and life is merely a by-product of material forces, there is, of course, no *reason* why the spirit should not decline until it perishes. For on this view, the expression of the spirit is like the bright colours on the head of a bird, an embellishment which having no cosmic significance will disappear with the conditions which gave them birth.

### *(b) If Creative Evolution is True*

If evolution is the expression of a creative force of life, then, presumably, if it is purposive and if, as some have supposed, its purpose is the achievement of ever higher and more intense levels of consciousness, so that, as Shaw puts it, that which 'when the world began was a whirlpool in pure force' shall become a 'whirlpool in pure intelligence', and if it created human beings in furtherance of its purpose, then it will either express itself in another human civilization to supersede that which has declined in respect of its specifically human qualities, or it will supersede man as a being incapable of carrying life to higher levels, send him to join the mammoth and the dinosaur on the scrap heap of evolution's other discarded experiments and contrive a creature better adapted for the furtherance of its purpose. It may, of course, be the case that the insects represent the next level of evolutionary advance and that man is, as I have suggested in the previous

## SPECULATIONS

chapter,<sup>1</sup> only a link between the brute and the insect. This view, however, seems to me to be frankly incredible. Indeed, unless the whole theme of this book is grossly mistaken, we cannot but regard the growing approximation of man to insects as a decline and not as an advance.

Proceeding, however, on the basis of the Life Force hypothesis, one may feel entitled to expect that some members of our generation or, alternatively, of the human species, will retain their original or, as I should prefer to put it, their human qualities and perform the office of links between men as they have been in the past and the men who are yet to be evolved, thus filling a rôle comparable to that of Shaw's long-livers in the third and fourth plays of the *Back to Methuselah* Pentateuch.

I have couched my statements of this view in Shaw's language, but the view has many forms. Shaw's Life Force appears as the *anima mundi* of Pantheism, as Bergson's *élan vital*, as Schopenhauer's Will, as Alexander's *nisus* towards a higher state. All these are views which conceive of reality as being all on the same level, which do not, therefore, make provision for the existence and intrusion into human affairs of any non-human level and which conceive, therefore, of God, in so far as they conceive of Him at all, as an *anima mundi*, wholly immanent in and in no way transcending the universe. I used to hold this view but, as will be evident from the earlier pages of this book, I have abandoned it. The main reasons for this abandonment are:

(i) It leaves unexplained the relation between the force of life or, if the expression be preferred, between an immanent God and matter;

(ii) it makes no adequate provision for moral experience;

(iii) It places God under sentence of death, since, if He is wholly immanent in the world, He will share the fate of the world which the second law of thermo-dynamics predicts. Accordingly, it makes no provision for religious experience;

(iv) It never succeeds in suggesting *how* the higher consciousness of more highly evolved beings will be employed; of indicating what, to put it crudely, they will think about. Consciousness is always directed upon something; higher consciousness upon

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiv, p. 371.



## SPECULATIONS

higher things, upon, in fact, value. Hence, in failing to make provision for a permanent, non-human 'object' upon which the consciousness of more developed beings could be directed, this view affords a clear example of the 'dropping of the object'. Assigning no non-temporal end to the temporal process, no permanent goal for human aspirations, it deprives the process of direction and the aspirations of significance.

### *(c) If the Universe contains non-personal Values*

Let us suppose that we so conceive the universe that provision is made for values which, though lying outside the time process, manifest themselves in it, truth in the subject matter of science and history and philosophy, beauty in art and nature, goodness in the conduct, relations and characters of persons. We are, then, committed to envisaging a universe at two levels; the level of becoming in the time process, the level at which evolution occurs, and the level of value which is outside time.

There are, of course, strong objections to this view.

(i) It leaves the values unanchored in the universe, pieces of cosmic furniture which are just 'lying about'. Now not only does the human mind aspire after value but it cannot divorce its aspirations from the conviction that values are in some way significant. But on the view I have just indicated, the values are just 'objects' which we happen to discover and which happen to exert a compelling power upon us. And the fact that they do have this power over us seems pointless.

(ii) The view leaves the relation between the world of value and the world of fact incomprehensible. We can no more understand *how* value can manifest itself in things than why it should do so.

(iii) It leaves the universe without explanation. There are two or, rather, three orders of being: mind, matter—in which mind expresses itself thus creating living organisms—and values. But why there should be just these three orders, and why they should be related as they are, is as incomprehensible as why there should be three values or four, if there are four, or  $n$ , if there are  $n$ . A haphazard universe of this kind offends the mind's craving for explanation in terms of some all-creating or all-reconciling unity.

## SPECULATIONS

To return to our question, if I am right in holding that there is, on this view, no *reason* (i) why things should be as they are, . . . why values should manifest themselves in objects, or . . . why the human mind should aspire after them, there is also no *reason* why the human mind and spirit should develop, should continue at their existing level or, if they become decadent and fade out, should be resuscitated. Assuming, then, that there is a development, or rather, a decay in the direction of insecthood, there is no *reason* why societies of free, individual, human spirits should ever again be reconstituted.

### *(d) If the Universe is the Creation of a Purposive Mind*

Let us now suppose that the universe is the expression of a purpose, having been created at a particular point of time by an all-powerful mind; that human beings are created in pursuance of the purpose and that the purpose can be furthered by their agency. On this assumption, it would, we might suppose, be inconsistent with the purpose that humanity should perish or should be permanently diminished in respect of its specifically human qualities. To put the point in another way, if God made man and gave him an immortal soul with the capacity of living a spiritual life, it is highly unlikely that the spirit should become permanently atrophied, since this would amount, in effect, to a permanent frustration of God's purpose. Where the immortal souls of 'insectified' human beings go, I do not pretend to know—the contingency is not, I think, one which has presented itself to the great theologians—but I find it difficult to believe that they go to heaven. If, then, our society decays into insecthood, it is reasonable to suppose that God will replace it by another.

Granted the theistic hypothesis we may, I think, also suppose that some human beings will be proof against the general process of 'insectification' and will retain the standards and values of civilized men, or will retain at least their memory much as the saints preserved the Christian faith in pagan lands and the monks some remnants of classical culture during the Dark Ages. Humanity, then, will not on this view die, any more than religion will die. There will always be some who retain the vision and

## SPECULATIONS

the faith in man, as there were always men to retain the faith in Christianity. This vision they will preserve during the period of 'insectification', should this occur, until the time is favourable for its renewed realization.

### *Contemporary Movements of Withdrawal*

It may be that the recrudescence of the interest in mystical religion in our own time is a pointer to future developments. For the practice of mystical religion has frequently been thought to require periods and sometimes whole lives of withdrawal. 'Eternity be thou my refuge' is the motto of all mystics. The motive here is metaphysical. Men withdraw from this world of coming to be and perishing, thinking to rescue the soul from its thralldom to change and chance that it may find its home in the eternal. This, which has been the main motive of many Christian and of almost all Hindu mystics, who identify what I have called the 'object' with the cutting off of desire, has operated in all ages.

More pertinent to the present discussion is the impulse which many spiritually-minded men have felt in times of exceptional strife and confusion to withdraw from the contaminating contact of a decaying society.

I have put this as if the impulse were primarily a selfish one, as if, in fact, the mystic were saying, 'Let the world go to the devil in its own way, provided that I save my soul intact'. Something of this is, no doubt, present, but withdrawal in times of violence and decay is very far from having been always prompted purely by a selfish egotism.

The following additional motives may be discerned: (i) By virtue of his knowledge of and intercourse with the 'object', the mystic gains a strength of mind and enjoys a serenity of spirit which to some extent insulates him against the passions and partisanships of the time and enables him, therefore, to preserve a comparatively detached and humane outlook. Seeing everything *sub specie aeternitatis*, he is able to see his own times in perspective and to assess their controversies and preoccupations at their true significance. This comparative immunity from the passions of the time has enabled him, as the Church was enabled

## SPECULATIONS

during the Dark Ages, to render practical assistance to the persecuted and oppressed. He has known that he could render such assistance and felt it to be his duty to act on his knowledge. This is a sound practical motive for withdrawal—there are periods of history when to withdraw may be the best way of enabling one to give help to one's fellows.

(ii) I have spoken thus far in terms of practical assistance, of food, shelter and protection; but there is also political influence. In the Western world at least the saint and the mystic have been able to fish effectively and often beneficially in the troubled waters of the times. The very fact that a man is known to be *au-dessus de la mêlée* has meant that his interventions have been more effective because less suspect.

(iii) By withdrawing, a man might also hope to keep alive some remnant of the culture of an earlier and more civilized time. There are certain standards of thought, as of conduct, which in periods of violence and confusion tend inevitably to be lowered. In general, an age characterized by what I have called 'the dropping of the object' is apt, as we have seen, to lose the sense of value. If the loss is sufficiently prolonged, the sense is in danger of atrophying. In such periods the perception of value might be retained by those who stood outside the stream, while the tastes and valuations in which the perception expresses itself would be cherished and pursued not only because they are good in themselves, but because the habits and preoccupations of the artist, the scholar and the contemplator might serve as a bridge to carry over some of the knowledge and traditions of the old world to help in the building of the new. Thus, those who have withdrawn might serve as a link between the civilization that has been and that which, on the supposition we are now considering, might be expected ultimately to arise on its ruins. It is, I suspect, motives of this kind which have inspired the movements of withdrawal in our own time, of which that associated with the names of Gerald Heard, Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley is, perhaps, the best known.

## SPECULATIONS

### 4. SOME POLITICAL SPECULATIONS

#### *(a) Intellectuals and Normals*

Let us, then, extend our speculations on the suppositions (i) that the general trend of contemporary development, assuming that we escape destruction by atom bombs, is in the direction of insecthood; (ii) that the universe is the creation of a purposive being and that the human race is the instrument of some at least of His purposes, with the corollary that some men will escape the impoverishment of the spirit which characterizes a society that has 'dropped the object' and will retain their full title to humanity.

We are, it seems to me, faced with a possible development of mankind along two different lines, culminating in two different categories of men. Many thinkers in the past have envisaged such a division. For Plato, there were the philosopher-guardians, in whom the first 'part' of the soul, the rational, was highly developed and controlled the other two 'parts'. The distinctive life of the philosopher-guardian consisted in the ever fuller knowledge and pursuit of the Forms of which Plato conceived reality to consist and, more particularly, of the Forms of goodness, beauty and truth. The rest, the producers and consumers of society, satisfied their desires, competed for wealth and power, were swayed by their emotions and reproduced their species. In a word, they lived wholly in the 'world of becoming'. The government of the State was carried on by the first category of men as a public duty, the masses being content to delegate to them the task of administering the State's business.

Aristotle envisaged a division on similar lines but the Aristotelian philosophers—'sages' would, perhaps, be their most appropriate designation—did not necessarily govern the State but, supported by slave labour, pursued a life of intellectual activity in scientific research and philosophical speculation embellished by the spiritual pleasures of aesthetic enjoyment.

It seems to me not improbable that, granted that our civilization survives, a not dissimilar division may gradually establish itself during the next hundred and fifty years, a division, that is to say, between the 'intellectuals'—I must apologize for the

## SPECULATIONS

unfortunate associations of the word ; I can find no other—and the ‘normals’. In the ‘intellectual’ the traditional life of the free mind and the awakened spirit will persist ; the ‘normals’, who, so far as their working life is concerned, will devote themselves entirely to the production and distribution of commodities and to matters ancillary thereto, will during their non-working hours have resort to ever more elaborate contrivances designed to enable them to support an ever more prolonged leisure. Since in them the life of the mind and the spirit will have largely atrophied, those marks by which one individual is distinguished from another will grow fainter. ‘Normals’, in fact, will become increasingly uniform. How will they regard the ‘intellectuals’?

### *(b) The Distribution of Power*

In considering the possibility of such a development, the objections commonly brought against the Platonic and the Aristotelian States on the score of their foundation in slave labour need not trouble us. The ‘intellectuals’ in the world of the future will be supported not by slaves but by machines. For what else are machines, rightly considered, but the inanimate slaves of animate purposes?

The question may, however, be raised, whether the ‘normals’ will be content to delegate to the ‘intellectuals’ the tasks and duties of government. I do not think that such delegation is impossible. The actual business of government is not in itself attractive, except in so far as it involves the exercise of power and the achievement of fame.

Power, as we have seen in chapter xiii, achieves an undue importance in the modern world because the disturbed times in which we live afford unduly frequent occasions for its exercise. Periods of transition when old-established societies are breaking up and others are being formed, and in a lesser degree the periods of slow decay which precede them, offer exceptional opportunities to able and vigorous men who turn the course of events to suit their purposes and ride to power on the rapids of the times.

But when society has for a long time been stable and peaceful, the power motive dwindles with the opportunities for its exercise.

## SPECULATIONS

I referred in the last chapter<sup>1</sup> to the atmosphere of the later Roman Empire, when men declined the duties of administration or hurried through them, in order the more quickly to return to the pleasures of private life. The eighteenth century both in France and England was another period in which many of the best and most vigorous minds preferred the exercise of the intellect and the cultivation of the spirit in philosophy, in science and in art to the grosser pleasures of power. As Lord Halifax said, 'the government of the world is a great thing but it is a very coarse one, too, compared with the fineness of speculative knowledge'.

Now I am, for the purposes of this discussion, envisaging a society which has already proceeded some distance in the direction of insecthood. It is the nature of insects to act under orders rather than to give them and the degree in which the conditions of human approximate to those of insect societies is also the degree in which men will be amenable to discipline and content with routine. Conscript soldiers, concentration camp prisoners, factory workers, Soviet masses, Hitler youth, queuing women, all exemplify this tendency in different ways. Every increase of bureaucratic control through an extended civil service fosters it. The more functions the State takes over from the individual, the fewer the individual becomes capable of exercising for himself. Thus, modern man who does not bring up his own children and only partially feeds them, who does not choose his own doctor, who has no voice in the spending of half his income, and whose mind is made up for him in regard to the disposal of most of the other half by advertisements, who is liable at any moment to be bidden to surrender both body and mind to the control and service of the State, who is dependent upon the community for support when he is old and for partial support for his wife at some and children at all times, for insurance against injury and sickness and for all the varied benefits of an advanced social legislation, modern man, I say, diminishingly acts as a responsible individual, freely exercising his judgement and following his inclinations in the planning and living of his own life as seems good to him.

Less versed in the determination of his own life, he becomes proportionately less ambitious of acquiring control over the lives

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiv, pp. 348, 349.

## SPECULATIONS

of others. Thus, in the world which I am envisaging, a new tendency will operate to diminish the keenness of the competition for power. First, to able, vigorous and vigorous men power will seem less desirable than it does in our present age. Secondly, 'normal' men will also desire power in less proportion as their lives afford diminished scope for its exercise.

It seems to me to be possible that in such conditions much of what we now regard as falling within the sphere of politics will devolve upon a greatly extended civil service. This will attract bureaucratically-minded men who love organization for its own sake, or who take to it not because they love it, but because it is intolerable for them to see others mismanage what they, if only they could manage better themselves.

A not dissimilar development is envisaged by Shaw in the third play of the *Back to Methuselah* Pentateuch. The government of the British Empire has been handed over to Chinamen and negresses under a titular British President five times elected as a figurehead for the State, since people like 'cheerful, good-natured barbarians'. The Archbishop, who is one of the first of the 'long-livers', points out that 'our routine work, and what may be called our ornamental and figure-head work, is being more and more sought after by the English; while the thinking, organizing, calculating, directing work is done by yellow brains, brown brains and black brains, just as it was done in my early days by Jewish brains, Scottish brains, Italian brains, German brains. The only white men who still do serious work are those who, like the Accountant General, have no capacity for enjoyment and no social gifts to make them welcome outside their offices'.

The suggestion here made is that provided the 'permanent officials are honest and competent', the public services will be run so well that in the end 'the government has nothing to do but think', which means in effect that, being British, the government has nothing to do but amuse itself. 'I don't know how you stand the work you do,' says the President in surprised remonstrance to the Chinese Secretary of State. 'You seem to me positively to like public business!'

Shaw's main point in this passage is that, since the biologically most advanced species and races have the longest periods of



## SPECULATIONS

gestation and adolescence, and since most of the English remain grown-up children for most of their lives, we must deduce that the English are biologically the most advanced race, so advanced that they mature only after their death. Hence, the necessity to live longer if our species is to survive. Meanwhile, the less advanced races of yellow men and black men who mature earlier take over the job of governing from the white men, thus setting them free for the pursuit of those childish and barbarous pleasures—marine golf is mentioned—which are natural to adolescents.

A subsidiary point, which is here my main point, is that when the struggle for power in the form in which it is familiar to us is eliminated, government will become a specialized job; will, in fact, become administrative and office work which the great mass of mankind, the 'normals', will be only too glad to have done for them by a specialized class of gifted men whom I have called the 'intellectuals'. I am suggesting, then, following Shaw, that a time may come when the 'normals' will hand over to the 'intellectuals' the drudgery of administration on behalf of the community as a whole.

### *(c) Intellectuals and the Philosophic Life*

Let us provisionally proceed on this assumption and put another question. Will the task of government and the business of administration content the 'intellectuals'? If the Greek philosophers may be believed, they will not. Plato's philosopher-guardians returned reluctantly to the Cave, deeming the government and administration of the city a debt which they owed in return for their nurture and education. Aristotle prescribed for his sages the lives of cultivated eighteenth-century gentlemen, engaged in the pursuit of science, the practice of philosophy and the contemplation and enjoyment of art. Nor did he attribute to them any marked disposition to meddle in politics. If the considerations adduced above touching the unattractiveness of administration to the 'normals' have any weight, their weight is, I think, not less in their application to the 'intellectuals'. I have quoted above Lord Halifax's remark to the effect that though 'the government of the world is a great thing . . . it is a very coarse one, too, compared with the fineness of speculative knowledge'.

## SPECULATIONS

There are, no doubt, men who are peculiarly fitted for the task of administration, and after a few years may become unfitted for anything else. But once the functions of government are shorn of the more obvious trappings of power and subside into the routine duties of complex administration, I do not believe that they will be found to exert upon first-rate men the attractions to which history has borne witness in the past. Another consideration arises touching the matter of age. In our own time and country, government has been largely exercised by old men. There are many reasons for this. One of them is that the competition for the higher posts in politics and administration is so keen that it is not until a man has been on the ladder for many years that he can climb to the upper rungs. Hence, the familiar spectacle of Cabinets with a membership whose average age is sixty or higher; hence, too, the smallness of the number of men who while in full possession of their faculties have voluntarily relinquished the reins of government. The same considerations account in part for the high age average of the heads of business concerns and public corporations. But where government is no longer the coveted or, at any rate, the exclusively coveted prize of the man of first-rate ability, this particular reason for the discharge of its functions by old men would lose some of its weight and another set of circumstances might have a chance to operate.

### *Retirement of the Old*

In many countries, but more particularly in the East, there runs a tradition to the effect that the life of retirement is appropriate to the old. The old man withdraws from the hurly-burly of the market place and the disputations of the council chamber in order to cultivate his garden, edit the poets, annotate the classics, or, in our own time, play golf. According to the Hindu tradition every life has its appropriate pattern—the Hindu word is *Dharma*; more precisely, there is a different pattern for every stage of a man's life. There are the pattern of the student life, the life of preparation and training, the pattern of the householder's life which includes marriage and citizenship, the pattern of the life of retreat, and the pattern of the life of renunciation. Retreat begins when one's

## SPECULATIONS

duties as a householder, wage-earner and family man are finished, one's children grown up, one's functions as a citizen performed. Renunciation involves a further withdrawal of the spirit from the society of one's fellows and the avocations of ordinary life.

Without particularizing further, we may say that the continuing tradition of civilized mankind inclines strongly to the view that the appropriate close to a successful career is the life of retirement and contemplation, contemplation directed upon what, in this book, I have called the 'object'.

The reason for this is obvious. It is only when the passions are dying and the emotions lose their intensity, that a man has a chance to achieve that quietude of spirit which is a condition of the life of contemplation and aesthetic enjoyment. Almost, one might say, that what in this book I have called the 'object' can be pursued only by a mind disengaged from mundane affairs. As Meredith puts it, 'it is only when the fire burns low in the grate, that the soul seeks kinship with the stars'. In so far as a knowledge of the 'object' is retained—and I am, it will be remembered, explicitly envisaging a condition in which this knowledge, though lost by the masses, has been retained by a few who, conscious of the obligation which their retention lays upon them, may well cherish it with a new intensity—it is not unreasonable to expect that during the last period of their lives those who retain it will be disposed not to office but to retirement.

What will they do in their retirement? Presumably, they will follow those pursuits which, if the argument of this book can be accepted, distinguish a non-decadent from a decadent society. They will, that is to say, apprehend and pursue the 'object' in all the forms of its manifestation, in the disinterested pursuit of truth, in the creation of and delight in what is beautiful, both in nature and in art, in the cultivation of personal relations and the service of their fellows, above all, perhaps, in the knowledge and love of God.

Mr. Clive Bell has suggested in his book *Civilization* that a wise society would maintain at public expense a leisured class of intellectuals with the express object of maintaining the level of public taste and raising it to new levels. The intellectuals of his conception would read, write, enquire, paint, compose, contemplate and enjoy as and when they felt inclined to do so. No

## SPECULATIONS

obligation would be laid upon them to produce work in any of the arts cannot be forced upon them. Interested thought and criticism can be had, it is commonplace that much first-rate work has been done against prevailing taste at its first appearance. For the real reason argues that a society which cared to encourage it would be favourable to the production of first-rate work in art and original thought in science and philosophy. It would be its intellectual class was both leisured and economically independent. Bell's suggestion is, I fear, impracticable. No society of 'normals' that has ever been known cares enough about the things of the mind and spirit to be willing to contribute to the maintenance of such a class. Its concern is with the betterment of life at the level at which it is being lived, not with seeing it go to new levels. I have sought to mitigate the rigour of Bell's proposal by suggesting, following Shaw,<sup>1</sup> that the intellectuals should undertake the tasks of government and administration, or, if they keep, and that, for the rest, they should be allowed to live as they please, cultivating in their leisure the life of the mind and the spirit. But this proposal raises another difficulty which may prove fatal to the whole course of development here envisaged.

### *Attitude of the 'Normals' to Pleasure*

Intellectuals will also, it may be supposed, cultivate the life of the senses and, in so doing, rouse the sleeping dogs of normal morality. The Greek tradition is not ascetic, it looks to the development of all the sides of a man's nature, of his senses and his body as well as of his mind and his spirit, provided a way in which that the former are controlled and guided by the latter. As I have tried in the preceding chapter to show, one of the symptoms of the decadence of our times is the neglect of this doctrine and the emphasis on the development of one set of functions to the detriment or atrophy of the others. The business man plays golf, but does little else for the development of his body, the football player reads an occasional paper but does nothing else for the development of his mind. I take it, however, for granted that

<sup>1</sup> See pp 404-6

## SPECULATIONS

civilized men will seek to embellish their lives with all those pleasures of the senses which contribute to the pattern of a full, a gracious and an urbane life.

Now it is one of the paradoxes of an age of mass-produced pleasures that it has little knowledge of or skill in the arts of pleasure. The enjoyment of what is most exquisite in pleasure no less than the appreciation of what is best in art depends upon the possession of good taste. The American who swills his burgundy is no less a man deprived than the savage who is deaf to Beethoven; both are deprived of the pleasures which are open only to a civilized man. Moreover, civilized pleasures which depend on the possession of taste are more lasting and enjoyable, though usually less intense than those which are produced for mass consumption and may be bought for money. For they contain elements of value other than their pleasantness.

### *Puritanism of the Masses*

Now in our own time the 'normals' have little cognizance of these more valuable but more difficult pleasures. Moreover, if the speculations at the beginning of this chapter foreshadow future developments in however small a degree, they are likely to know not more of them but less. There is, indeed, and always has been, a marked strain of Puritanism in 'normals'. How else are we to explain the paradox that an age of potential leisure, in which more elaborate provision is made for the amusement of the masses than ever before, should be an age in which so little is known of the arts of pleasure? To take one instance where many might be cited, there are some simple pleasures which have hitherto been available for the asking, which can now only be enjoyed in return for a considerable expenditure of money. For example, the pleasure of sitting quietly in the sunlight which has always afforded peculiar gratification to the old is one which in our large cities is exceedingly hard to procure. The streets of New York are canyons running between the cliffs of sky-scrapers into which the sun rarely penetrates, so that to enjoy sunlight in privacy and quiet one must be rich enough to own an apartment with a roof garden and a balcony. In how many places in London or Glasgow

## SPECULATIONS

can a man sit at peace in the sun and read a book or paper without being disturbed by the noise of continuous traffic? To take another illustration, in all ages men have delighted to honour their destroyers. Caesar and Alexander, Attila and Genghis Khan, Gustavus Adolphus and Napoleon, occupy the lion's share of attention in our history books, while in every capital the generals and admirals are commemorated by the highest statues. But the givers of delight have in all ages been relatively neglected. I do not hazard the view that Bach, Mozart and Beethoven have given at least as much, sheer pleasure to mankind as that any other men who have ever lived—perhaps more. Others, no doubt, would give their vote to poets, prose writers, painters, comedians, dramatists, even to architects. Yet the names of any outstanding persons in these departments, with the exception of that of Shakespeare, are, compared with those of Marlborough and Nelson, Wellington and Napoleon, almost unknown to the 'normals'. These are general considerations true in their measure of all ages. Yet I doubt whether in any age the pleasure-producing arts have been so neglected as in our own. The man, or rather the men, for there were several, who have been responsible for more negative pleasure than any of their fellows are the inventors of anaesthetics. Yet how many know the names of Warren and Simpson? In our own day the man who has given delight to more of his fellow men than any of his contemporaries is Charlie Chaplin; yet already his name is beginning to fade from memory. The inventors of new and exquisite combinations of flavours which delight the palate would surely deserve to be honoured by people that care for pleasure; yet how many know the name of Brillat-Savarin?

### *The Pleasures of Food and Drink*

The mention of his name tempts me to dwell for a moment on the pleasures of eating and drinking. In the past a man could drink with his food at a restaurant, at a café or in a garden. But in London and New York, which of all cities are perhaps most typical of the civilization which is advancing, the difficulty of feeding out of doors is very great, while the whole business of

## SPECULATIONS

drinking is hedged about with restrictions. In London you can drink only at certain hours and most drinking is unaccompanied by food; in Sweden, on the other hand, you can drink at most hours but only if you eat when you drink. Thus, the simple pleasures of food and drink, which all men have hitherto enjoyed as and when they pleased, are rendered difficult of access. They can be enjoyed only at certain times, in certain situations and under certain conditions. In the contemporary world strong tendencies are operative further to reduce these pleasures. To reduce them, first, in point of quantity. Even before the war people who could afford to eat and drink what they chose often chose to eat very little. Compare the simple meals of a middle-class couple living in a city flat or a country cottage with the enormous spreads which Parson Woodforde describes in the eighteenth century or the scarcely less splendid meals of the nineteenth. I doubt if greediness can ever have been at such a discount as it is today. It is, indeed, difficult for us to conceive that it should ever have been numbered one of the seven deadly sins, so small is our own temptation in this department.

We have also reduced them in point of variety and complexity. The ideal today is to live as simply as possible on prepared breakfast foods and meals taken ready cooked out of boxes and tins. It is rarely that attention is paid to pleasing of the palate of the visitor, and Dr. Johnson, who held that 'though this was a good dinner enough to be sure, it was not a dinner to *ask* a man to', would not often feel that his host had been entitled to extend an invitation. Greediness, indeed, is out of fashion. 'For my part I mind my belly very studiously and very carefully; for I look upon it that he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else.' I quoted this recently to a young married couple who considered it to be faintly disgusting nonsense. Nor is it only the well-to-do who in the past have expended care and attention in the effort to provide the varied and exquisite sensations of the palate. Mr. Micawber, when expecting hourly to be arrested for debt, regaled David Copperfield with 'a beautiful little dinner. Quite an elegant dish of fish, the kidney end of a loin of veal roasted, fried sausage meat, a partridge and a pudding. There was wine and there was strong ale; and after dinner

## SPECULATIONS

Mrs. Micawber made us a bowl of hot punch with her own hands'.

The tendency to emphasize the simplicity while reducing the quantity of food is also defended on the ground of increased efficiency. A snack at a bar is commended because it saves time—time, one might ask, in which to do what? It is a familiar paradox, one of the commonest of our age, that there was never a generation with so little time to spare as our own which is always saving it. The logical conclusion of present tendencies is the provision of meals, if meals they can be called, consisting of an assortment of highly nourishing tablets complete with vitamins and calories and whatever else may be necessary to the maintenance of a healthy body. In short, we shall eat to live. The reflection that the brutes do no less and that in the past it has been the glory of mankind to transform the satisfaction of a need into the cultivation of an art will have little weight with the 'normals' of the society I am envisaging, who will, I suspect, transfer much of the reprobation which the Victorians felt, but which *they* will feel no longer, for the pleasures of the bed to the pleasures of the table. For we all tend to reprove the pleasures that we do not share and

*'Compound for sins that we're inclined to  
By damning those that we've no mind to'.*

I should not be surprised, then, if the desire of the 'intellectuals' to live the good life, in so far as it expresses itself on the plane of the senses, excited the jealousy, masquerading as moral disapproval, of the 'normals'.

The resultant hostility to 'intellectuals' may well endanger the whole concept of a separate governing class.

### *Author's Defence of his Illustration*

It may be objected that to introduce the topic of the enjoyment of food and drink at the close of what is intended to be a serious contribution to philosophy is beneath the dignity of a subject to which it is irrelevant. I reply: (a) that Plato would have introduced and did, in fact, introduce similar topics; (b) that the objection, if brought, would proceed from that deplored attitude of mind which



## SPECULATIONS

both in the first chapter and in the chapter on specialization I have sought to describe, and so would serve at once to illustrate my description and confirm the conclusion I drew from it. For would not such an objection furnish an admirable illustration of the specialization upon which I animadverted in the last chapter<sup>1</sup>, which, while permitting an author to feed upon a certain range of pastures, will not suffer him to stray outside them, even if the course of his wandering thought naturally and easily takes him outside? (c) That I am here concerned with the cultivation of the arts of pleasure by the 'intellectuals' and the pleasures of food and drink are the most regular, the most lasting and the most punctually recurrent of all our pleasures. They colour our outlook, comfort our declining years and punctuate the long hiatus of our days. 'Seared is, of course, my heart', writes Calverley, 'but unsubdued is and shall be my appetite for food.' Hence, they constitute an admirable example to illustrate my theme. (d) That this has been a long, at times a difficult, at times, I fear, a dull book, and a passage which may give the reader as much in the way of diversion to read as it has the author in the way of pleasure to write won't do either of us any harm. (e) That the illustration affords plausible support for the conclusion which it has been the object of this section to establish, namely, that the jealousy of the 'normals' for the varied and cultivated life of the 'intellectuals' may ultimately make the position of the latter impossible. Although the pleasures which the civilized enjoy involve experiences in which the uncivilized are unable to share, the latter are unable to rid themselves of the suspicion that they are 'being done out' of something by the civilized, and cannot readily forgive those who cause them to entertain it. Their attitude is that of the dog in the manger—if we cannot ourselves enjoy these experiences, we will declare that there is nothing in them. The contemptuous use in this connection of the word 'brainy' to indicate the peculiar qualities of the 'intellectual' which are not only those which 'the normal' is without, but those which he feels himself to be better without, is instructive. Hence, if the power of suppression exists as in the society I am envisaging it would do, we must allow for the possibility that the 'normals' might forbid altogether the enjoyment

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiv, pp. 361–4.

## SPECULATIONS

of pleasures of which they are incapable and whose existence they would deny. When we add to this the spite which the superiority of superior persons engenders in inferiors made conscious of their inferiority and anxious to take it out of those who make them feel it, the threat to the pleasures of the 'intellectuals' and, indeed, to the whole level of consciousness at which such pleasures are possible becomes sufficiently apparent. For these reasons, I think it highly doubtful whether the 'normals' would be prepared to tolerate the existence of a class of 'intellectuals' not only capable of the higher experiences of the mind and the spirit but of the more exquisite delights of the senses, even if the latter paid their way in society by taking over the business of government and the duties of administration. Hence, though it is reasonably likely that the work of government will be increasingly delegated to a special class, it is doubtful whether that class will be permitted to live the life and enjoy the experiences proper to fully developed men. To revert to Plato's simile, the philosopher-guardians will be allowed to rule in the Cave, but we may be pardoned for wondering whether they will be allowed to leave it.

### *Corruption of the 'Intellectuals'*

Will they wish to leave it? This depends upon the answer to another question, namely, will the 'intellectuals' escape infection by the 'normals', or, to put the point more generally, is it conceivable that in a society whose standards of taste and enjoyment are low, which is ignorant of art, which knows nothing of disinterested thought, which is without religion and, apparently, feels no need of religion, but which through its power of reading is both articulate and expressive and is enabled at once to gratify and to impose its taste—is it possible, I ask, that in such a society a class of highly developed philosophers, artists and scholars, assured of the reality which underlies and manifests itself in the visible world, and seeking ever to increase the scope and intensity of their awareness of it, can live and thrive? In the past the answer would seem to have been, yes, it is possible. Plato and Aristotle envisaged such a class; in ancient Athens it did for a time exist and also, in a less eminent degree, in ancient Rome. It

## SPECULATIONS

appeared again in the Italian cities of the Renaissance,<sup>1</sup> flourished in eighteenth-century France and reached a high degree of development in the country houses of eighteenth-century England, to which we owe our first laboratories, museums and picture galleries. In each of these communities the 'intellectuals' constituted a leisured highly cultivated class, largely maintained by the labour of the uneducated masses. But in the society of the future which I am here envisaging, the conditions will be different, different and unprecedented. In all previous ages the masses were indeed uneducated and the influence of their tastes and desires was, therefore, negligible. There was no question of *their* concepts of the pleasant, the good, the beautiful and the true being imposed upon any but themselves. In our own day for the first time in history most human beings in Europe and the U.S.A. can read; they also have some money to spend and leisure in which to spend it. As a result there has sprung up for the first time in human history a vast industry devoted both to stimulating and satisfying the untrained tastes of the masses. The mass products of this industry are novels of the twopenny library class, the cinema and 'light music' in all its forms, the first substituting for literature, the second for painting and poetry, the third for music.<sup>2</sup> When people urge that public taste is lower today than it was in the eighteenth century, what they mean is not so much that the taste of the class which in our age is analogous to the class of the eighteenth-century-scholars, critics and creative authors of Dr. Johnson's circle is lower; what they mean is that in our own time this class is set in the midst of an environment of bad literature, bad art and bad music which did not in the eighteenth century exist and which through the influence of the environment it sets up lowers the standard of the whole.

### *The Plight of the Contemporary 'Intellectual'*

But a further question may be asked, granted that the standard of the whole is lower, is the level of taste and intelligence of contemporary 'intellectuals' lower than that of their predecessors in Dr. Johnson's time? Emphasizing the radical difference of

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xiv, pp. 351-3.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter xi, pp. 270, 271 and 282, 283 for an enlargement of this theme.

## SPECULATIONS

conditions, many would deny that a comparison could be made. Others would assert that it is, in fact, lower, alleging the difficulty of living the life of the intellect and the spirit in times of stress and trouble. If such a contention were in fact to be urged, I, for my part, would not wish to demur. But attention might be drawn to another consideration, at once more subtle and more potent. Plato in the *Republic* says that there exist two enemies to seduce a man from the pursuit of the good and the path of duty, pain and pleasure. He may be so browbeaten and baited and bullied and tortured, he may be so ground down by hardship and misfortune, that his eyes are blinded to the vision of value; or he may wittingly turn traitor and betray the light that is in him through fear. Conversely, he may be so bribed and cajoled by flattery, his senses may be so seduced and softened by luxury, that he may turn aside through pleasure. Now, of the two, the seduction of pleasure is, Plato says, a stronger deterrent than the solicitations of pain. It is by the second, as much as, perhaps more than by the first of these two enemies that the intellectual life of our time is threatened. Pitch, we say, defiles what it touches: but it defiles in the aesthetic no less than in the moral sphere, and it may well be that it is impossible for men to live continually in an environment of cinema and radio and 'light music', cheap magazines and sensational Sunday papers without being to some extent affected by that environment. With the best will in the world, it is hard to keep one's tastes pure and one's standards high, while the attempt to do so tends, by reason of the persistent effort and endeavour that it involves, to turn the endeavourer into a prig. It is only by *appearing* supercilious that one is able steadily to maintain in season and out of season that the things that one knows to be good are good and the things that one knows to be bad are bad. Or it may be that the unremitting maintenance of one's own standards in a society which is largely unsympathetic renders a man supercilious in fact as well as in appearance; or, yet again, superciliousness may well be the armour which he must put on to steel himself against the seduction of the temptation of the smart novels, the glossy films, the slick reportage, the crooning that oozes from his radio set. (And yet, on reflection, one is tempted to wonder whether any 'intellectual'

## SPECULATIONS

has ever yet been seduced by crooning.) Whatever may be the truth in this complicated matter, it is clear that the effects of a pre-eminently philistine environment upon those who are aware of the 'object' and seek to pursue it are likely to be more deleterious than the relatively neutral effects of an environment consisting of wholly uneducated persons. In our own society one of two things is apt to happen; one gives up the struggle, lowers one's standards and pays tribute to those substitutes for the true, the good and the beautiful that the multitude admires, or one maintains them and becomes hard, contemptuous and precious. The first is known to us as *la trahison des clercs*; the second is the way of the contemporary poets and writers of the highbrow journals, of *Horizon* and *Polemic* and *New Writing*. Of these two ways the former is at once the commoner and the more deadly.

Now, I am envisaging a society in which the pleasures of the 'normals' are catered for by every agency which studies to acquire skill in exploiting the leisured ease of the newly enfranchised masses. It is a society set in an environment of football and football pools, of dirt track racing, dog racing, horse racing, radio, cinema, golf, bars, hotels, beauty parlours, country clubs and 'harmony' orchestras, and their extensions and developments raised to a pitch of efficiency which our imaginations, nourished only on the comparatively undeveloped resources for pleasure-production in our own times, cannot picture. For the nearest approximation to a sketch of such a society with which I am acquainted, I refer the reader once again to Aldous Huxley's book, *Brave New World*. My question, then, is whether it is possible in such a society that any refinement of the spirit, any integrity of the mind, any purity of thought or disinterestedness of endeavour, can survive to care for and to create what is beautiful, to discover and to pursue what is true, actively to practise what is good and to maintain an assurance of the existence and an inkling of the nature of God.

### *The Relevance of Religion*

Many would, no doubt, hold that even if we are to assume a gradual development of the mass of mankind in the direction of

## SPECULATIONS

insecthood, a certain proportion will continue to retain and to advance in respect of the distinctively human qualities of reason and spirit. Some men, they would maintain, there will always be, to continue the search for truth, to strive after righteousness, and care for beauty and the things of the spirit, because that, after all, is man's nature.

This is the humanist's answer; it appeals to an optimistic view in regard to the nature of man upon the adoption of which its plausibility depends and its acceptance does not, so humanists would insist, involve the prior acceptance of any theological doctrine or religious belief. I myself would formerly have given this answer.

I can give it no longer because I can no longer take the optimistic view of man's nature upon which Humanism relies and to which it appeals. Man seems to me to be sinful and, in part, evil, and his nature contains no necessary assurance of increasing reasonableness and righteousness. Also, I do not think that he can advance as a reasonable and spiritual, that is to say, as a distinctively *human*, being except help be given to him from outside. Man's further advance depends, in fact, upon the inpouring of grace which is vouchsafed to him by the divine author of his being.

It comes, then, for me to this, that the answer which we should give to the question I have asked depends in the last resort upon the view which we take of religion. If we think that the universe was created by an omnipotent Being to fulfil a purpose and that human beings are the instruments of that purpose, then it must, I think, be deemed inconsistent with its fulfilment that we should all of us perish or, alternatively, that we should all subside into insects. While I do not feel prepared to go so far as Irenaeus in maintaining that 'God arranged everything from the first with a view to the perfection of man, in order to deify Him and reveal His own dispensations, so that goodness may be made manifest, justice made perfect. . . . Thus man may eventually reach maturity, and being ripened by such privileges may see and comprehend God', I find myself equally unable to subscribe to the pessimism of Goethe's anticipation of a time 'coming when God will take no more pleasure in the race, and must proceed again to a rejuvenated creation', though I ought, perhaps, in fairness to include Goethe's addition, 'that time is certainly a long way off'. For my

## SPECULATIONS

part, I cannot square the extinction of humanity, even if such extinction is postponed to the remote future, with the belief that God created man as an immortal soul destined for eternal life. I find it equally hard to believe in a divine purpose that could be fully realized by the attainment on the part of some members of the human species or even of our species as a whole of the level of twentieth-century Nordic adults, followed by a complete cessation of further development. If God created man for a purpose, then man must, one would think, continue to evolve and develop *beyond* his present stage. If man's evolution were to stop now, we cannot, I think, avoid the conclusion that he would have to be written off as a failure—yet it is hard to see how a divine purpose could *fail*. If, however, man's evolution is to continue, then some means must be found of arresting those tendencies towards a growing uniformity of mind and behaviour and impoverishment of spirit coupled with an ever-increasing development and organization of the material side of life, which I have called 'the advance to insecthood'. It is, alas, not easy to see what form the means could take.

### *Postscript*

The contents of this last chapter belong to the category of speculations; they are guesses at the future, the fruit of imagination merely. What I have tried to do is to imagine the development of tendencies discernible in the present. But I may well be wrong in thinking that the tendencies which I have selected are likely to grow in the remote or even to continue in the near future. At any given moment, the human situation is infinitely complex, criss-crossed by a thousand currents which run athwart the course of history, and it is hard to discern those in the present which are potent to determine the development of the future, while, even if the right tendencies are selected, they may develop in ways other than I have supposed.

For history teaches us that almost all guesses about the future are mistaken, from Condorcet's prophecy, 'the human race, freed from its fetters, withdrawn from the empire of chance and from that of the enemies of progress, will walk with firm and

## SPECULATIONS

assured step in the way of truth, virtue and happiness', made just before the French Revolution, to the announcements made by the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury in 1848, 'nothing can save the British Empire from shipwreck', by Disraeli in 1849, 'in industry, commerce and agriculture there is no hope', and the Duke of Wellington who in 1852, on the threshold of the most uniformly successful period in English history, thanked God that he should be 'spared from seeing the consummation of ruin that is gathering about us'.

Speculation, at all times hazardous, is particularly so in a time like the present which wears the appearance of an interim age, an age in exile between two worlds, the one dead, the other trying, yet failing to be born. The late Hellenistic was another such age; the Alexandrian another. It may well be that these interim ages and the qualities associated with them constitute the clearest examples of what the common sense of mankind has always recognized as decadence.

Humility and history combine, then, to teach me that what I have prophesied here will almost certainly not come to pass. This conclusion was recently brought home to me by a reading of the only book specifically concerned with decadence that I have been able to find. It consists of a reprint of a lecture delivered by the late Lord Balfour at Newnham College in 1908, six years before the first great war. Lord Balfour was a very wise man, but he had not the slightest conception of what was coming. Society, he thought, would go from strength to strength, so that 'whatever be the perils in front of us, there are, so far, no symptoms either of pause or of regression in the onward movement which, for more than a thousand years, has been characteristic of Western civilization'. This rosy prospect was due, he thought, to the increasing power of science and its increasing application to industry. In the alliance between science and industry Lord Balfour saw unlimited possibilities of human progress. This, I repeat, was written six years before the first great war, thirty-one before the second and thirty-eight before the discovery of atomic energy and the use of the first atomic bomb.



## Summary

---

I append a summary of the position which I have tried to maintain in the preceding pages: (1) There is an immaterial world which is other than the familiar world we know by means of our senses and which imposes some of its characteristics upon the familiar world. (2) This world is neither spatial nor temporal. Urban in his book, *The Intelligible World*, describes this characteristic of what he calls the real world as follows: 'Of the things in Space and Time we say, this thing is outside that, they cannot coincide and amalgamate; this thing comes after that, the former must disappear before the latter arrives. But our minds tell us that there is a large class of objects of which these statements are not true, and the meaning of which are incommunicable in these terms.' (3) Among the most eminent of the non-temporal, non-spatial realities are values. They are eternal and the full knowledge and consciousness of value and of God who is its source is the true end of the soul. (4) The values are manifested in the world of sensory changing things and we can, therefore, attain to some knowledge of them, even in our present condition. The awareness of value forms no less integral a part of our experience than the judgements which are based upon sense perception. We experience this awareness pre-eminently in the enjoyment of art and natural beauty, in the recognition and pursuit of truth in history and science and mathematics and philosophy and in imaginative literature, in the effort to do our duty for its own sake and in the service of God and our neighbour.

(5) It is the manifestation of the realm of value in the world of everyday life that throughout this book I have called the 'object'. I have maintained that the 'object' so conceived is not a product of human consciousness and is not instrumental to life or a means to life's improvement. The 'object' is end rather than means in the sense that to know the 'object' more fully and to pursue it more intensely is the true purpose of a life rightly lived.

## SUMMARY

(6) Man alone among living creatures is endowed with reason and spirit. But these are not two different faculties; they are different but overlapping forms of the same vital energy directed, in so far as they overlap, to the same end. The spirit grasps intuitively the truths which reason approaches by gradual stages. It is in the life of the reason and the spirit that the specific differentia of our species lies and it is in their development that its excellence is to be found. Reason and spirit are free and we are free to develop them or not as we choose.

(7) Provided that it operates validly according to laws which it itself discovers reason can provide us with true information about the universe. It can do this because the universe is rational and because its true nature as a world of value is revealed to reason, no less than to spirit, in the form of what I have called the 'object'. Hence, to cultivate the 'object' is not to pursue a will of the wisp of our own making but is to penetrate through the world of becoming to the real world which underlies it. In general, it may be said that, while thought reveals to us the structure of reality, spirit brings us into communion with it.

### *Factors Hostile to Traditional Philosophy*

These conclusions I believe to form part of, or, at least, to be in line with, the *philosophia perennis* which, starting from Plato and Aristotle, running through the neo-Platonists and subsequently reinforced and enriched by Christianity, has been the dominant common philosophy of European culture. So far, then, I have only restated in modern terms what those who in the past have known something both of philosophy and theology have believed. This philosophy is attacked in our own day from a number of different quarters:

(1) By the belief in evolutionary process which elevates progress into a cosmic law, regards the human mind as the only source of value and conceives God as wholly immanent in the evolving world.

(2) By biology which identifies good with whatever happens to evolve.

(3) By psychology and, more particularly, by psycho-analysis

## SUMMARY

which regards man's aspirations after moral value and truth as sublimations of instinctive urges and drives, owning no counterpart in reality—and unsupported by any guarantee of their fulfilment.

(4) By an aesthetic subjectivism which holds that the function of art is expression, that is to say, expression of the human personality, and denies the existence of an objective beauty which it is the function of art to make manifest.

(5) By an almost universal subscription to power politics which implicitly, though not explicitly, denying that the improvement of society and increase of individual well-being are the ends of politics, regards the achievement of power on the part of the few and subservience to the State on the part of many as the only legitimate purposes of political action.

(6) By a resultant attitude to science as the conferrer of power. The conception of science as the disinterested search for truth is attacked and discredited, as the notion that religion is the search for God is discredited. Both science and religion are thus subordinated to human ends. This subordination is reinforced by a scepticism in regard to objective truth; it is doubted whether objective truth exists, and doubted whether, if it exists, it is attainable.

All these tendencies culminate in two familiar characteristics of our time: (i) The subjectivist analysis of moral, religious, aesthetic and scientific judgements according to which the mind, when judging and thinking, makes contact not with external 'objects' but only with the projections of its own activity; (ii) a consequent refusal to acknowledge the existence of what I have called the 'object', and a resultant doctrine to the effect that it is in human experience and the expressions of human experience and not in the 'object' of that experience that value is to be found.

In these two beliefs, the first about the nature and object of human thinking and the second about the nature and object of human judgements of value, I find the common core of the notion of decadence in most of the many senses in which it is used.

# INDEX OF NAMES



# Index of Names

- À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, 62  
 Acton, Lord, 325, 340  
 Addison, 92  
 Adler, 199  
 Aeschylus, 84  
 Alberti, 12, 352, 370  
 Alexander, 63, 323, 411  
 Alexander, Prof., 397  
*Anatomy of Melancholy (The)*, 87  
 Anaxagoras, 354  
*Architectural Review*, 314  
 Aristippus, 40  
 Aristophanes, 63  
 Aristotle, 21-6, 27, 31, 40, 41, 44,  
 166, 170, 174, 203, 205, 208, 209,  
 211, 336, 402, 406  
 Arnold, M., 97  
*Ascent of F 6 (The)*, 306  
 Attila, 411  
 Auden, W. H., 306  
 Augustine, 41  
*Autobiography (An)*, 203  
  
 Bach, J. S., 59, 85, 87, 274, 279, 282,  
 411  
*Back to Methuselah*, 46, 62, 397, 405  
 Bacon, 354  
 Balfour, Lord, 56, 354, 421  
 Barnes, W., 88  
 Bayle, 37  
 Beardsley, Aubrey, 62  
 Beaumont, 86  
 Beerbohm, Max, 285  
 Beethoven, 85, 87, 126, 136, 152, 176,  
 182, 274, 411  
 Bell, Clive, 86, 139, 367, 408-9  
 Belloc, H., 297  
 Bennett, A., 272-3, 297  
 Bentham, 45  
 Bergson, 96, 297  
*Beyond Good and Evil*, 311  
 Blackwood, A., 284  
 Blake, Admiral, 354  
 Boccaccio, 63  
 Borrow, 87  
 Boswell, 86  
 Botticelli, 383  
 Bowen, Elizabeth, 290  
 Bradley, F. H., 113, 218  
  
 Bragg, Sir L., 191  
*Brave New World*, 282, 284, 337, 364,  
 418  
 Brillat-Savarin, 411  
 Browne, Sir Thomas, 174  
 Bunyan, 310  
 Burckhardt, 351-2  
 Butler, Samuel, 283, 392  
  
 Caesar, 411  
 Caird, E., 45  
 Callot, 73  
 Calverley, 414  
 Capek, Karel, 393  
 Carr, E. H., 80  
*Case of General Ople and Lady Cam-  
 per (The)*, 284  
 Castiglione, 370  
 Catullus, 63  
 Cervantes, 84  
 Cézanne, 152  
 Chaplin, Charlie, 411  
 Chase, J. H., 259  
 Chaucer, 56, 84  
 Chekov, 287-8  
 Chesterton, G. K., 230, 247  
 Chopin, 85, 126  
*Christus Veritas*, 164  
*Civilization*, 86, 140, 408  
*Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy  
 (The)*, 351  
 Clare, 88  
 Clark, Sir K., 260, 261-2, 266, 278,  
 314, 315, 319  
 Collingwood, Prof., 19, 29, 203  
*Common Reader (The)*, 99  
*Concept of Dread (The)*, 49  
 Condorcet, 420  
 Congreve, 63  
*Conquest of Happiness (The)*, 45  
 Conrad, 284  
 Constable, 279  
*Cornhill*, 291  
 Cowper, 61  
 Cyrus, 63  
  
 Dali, S., 295  
 Dante, 63  
 Darwin, Charles, 364

## INDEX OF NAMES

- Darwin, Erasmus, 62  
*Daughters of the Colonel (The)*, 288  
*David Copperfield*, 412  
 Debussy, 64, 126  
*Decadence*, 55  
 Deffand, Madame du, 93  
*Degeneration*, 56  
 Delius, 64  
*Deutsche Wehr*, 83  
 Dickens, 56, 342, 412  
 Diderot, 37  
 Disraeli, 354, 421  
 Dobree, Bonamy, 362  
 Donatello, 383  
 Dostoïevski, 284  
 Dowson, Ernest, 62  
 Dryden, 58  
  
 Eddington, 316, 364  
*Education for a New Society*, 271  
 Elia, 276  
 Eliot, T. S., 305, 310  
*Elizabeth and Essex*, 73  
*End of the Passage (The)*, 284  
*Ends and Means*, 331  
*English Social History*, 91  
 Erasmus, 33, 360  
*Essay on Criticism (An)*, 58  
  
*Family Reunion*, 305  
 Farnaby, Giles, 275  
 Feltre, Vittorino da, 360, 370  
 Fichte, 325  
 Ficino, 383  
 Fielding, 63, 86  
 Fisher, H. A. L., 33, 68, 83, 258, 265, 349, 351, 360  
 Flaubert, 62, 91, 395  
 Fletcher, 86  
 Flügel, 196-7  
 Forster, E. M., 297  
 Fra Angelico, 282  
 Fra Filippo Lippi, 383  
 Freud, 199  
*From the Chinese*, 61  
 Fry, Roger, 152, 367  
  
 Galsworthy, 284, 297  
 Genghiz Khan, 63, 411  
 Gershwin, 110  
 Ghirlandajo, 383  
*Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, 284  
 Gibbon, 86, 92  
 Gibbons, Orlando, 275  
 Giotto, 84  
 Goethe, 363, 419  
 Gray, Thomas, 279  
  
 Green, Ernest, 271  
 Green, T. H., 45  
 Greene, Graham, 297  
 Guicciardini, 383  
 Gustavus Adolphus, 411  
  
 Haldane, J. B. S., 364  
 Halifax, Lord, 404, 406  
*Hamlet*, 310  
 Handel, 85  
 Hannibal, 63  
*Happy Hypocrite (The)*, 285  
*Hard Times*, 342  
 Hardy, 88, 284, 289, 297  
 Haskins, Caryl T., 385  
 Hauser, Heinrich, 83  
 Haydn, 85  
 Hazlitt, 321  
*Heart of Darkness*, 284  
 Hegel, 40, 48, 119, 325  
 Hemingway, 295, 297  
 Hill, Dr. A. V., 27-8  
*History of Europe (A)*, 33, 83, 258, 351  
*History of Western Philosophy (A)*, 98, 139  
 Hitler, 323  
 Hobbes, 40, 50  
 Holbach, 37  
 Homer, 56, 84, 87  
 Hoole, John, 62  
*Horizon*, 290, 295, 300, 312, 418  
 Hudson, W. H., 284  
 Hume, 45, 50, 86, 92  
*Hundred Years of Psychology (A)*, 196  
*Husband of Akoulka (The)*, 284  
 Huxley, Aldous, 73, 74, 75-7, 101, 300-4, 331  
 Huxley, Julian, 232, 239-42, 337, 364, 418  
  
 Ibsen, 310  
*Ideal Husband (An)*, 62  
*Importance of Being Earnest (The)*, 62  
*In the Library*, 284  
*Insect Play (The)*, 393  
*Intelligible World (The)*, 423  
 Irenaeus, 419  
 Isherwood, 306  
  
 Jacobs, W. W., 284  
 James, H., 284  
 James, M. R., 284  
 James, W., 89, 203  
*Jean Christophe*, 176  
 Jeans, 364  
 Jefferies, Richard, 88

## INDEX OF NAMES

- Jerome, Jerome K., 284  
 Johnson, Dr., 68, 92, 279, 321, 412  
*Johnson over Jordan*, 306  
 Jonson, Ben, 86  
 Jowett, 45  
 Joyce, James, 99, 199  
 Jung, 199  
  
 Kafka, 292  
 Kant, 42, 48, 135, 218, 279  
 Kavan, Anna, 300-4  
 Keats, 45  
 Kierkegaard, 48  
*King Lear*, 152, 310  
 Kipling, 284, 297  
 Koestler, Arthur, 220-6, 297, 337  
  
 Lafontaine, 63  
 Lange, Max, 180  
 Lawrence, D. H., 199  
 Lear, Edward, 87  
 Leonardo da Vinci, 184, 279, 352, 370, 383  
 Ley, Dr., 83  
 Libertins, the, 37  
*Life of Ma Parker*, 288  
 Locke, 41, 45  
*Long, Long Ago*, 110  
 Lorenzo dei Medici, 383  
*Loves of the Plants*, 62  
 Lucretius, 63  
 Lyell, 364  
  
 McDougall, 197-9  
 Machiavelli, 383  
*Madame de Mauves*, 284  
*Major Critical Essays*, 56  
*Man, Morals and Society*, 197  
*Man and Superman*, 46  
 Mansfield, Katherine, 288  
*Mark of the Beast (The)*, 284  
 Marlborough, 411  
 Marlowe, 86  
*Marta Requielme*, 285  
 Marvell, Andrew, 339  
 Massinger, 86  
 Matisse, 152, 365  
 Maugham, W. Somerset, 286, 287-8, 297  
 Maupassant, de, 284  
 May, Dr. Nunn, 332-3  
 Melbourne, Lord, 354  
*Memory-Hold-The-Door*, 35  
 Meredith, 284, 297  
 Messalina, 63  
 Michelangelo, 383  
 Mill, John Stuart, 45, 182  
  
 Milton, 84, 323  
*Miraculous Birth of Language (The)*, 133  
*Monkey's Paw (The)*, 284  
 Montaigne, 37, 84  
 Moore, G. E., 45  
 Morphy, 180  
 Mozart, 85, 87, 168-9, 274, 411  
*Murder in the Cathedral*, 305  
 Murray, Gilbert, 98  
 Mussolini, 82  
  
 Napoleon, 64, 323, 411  
*Narcissus Bay*, 291  
*Nature*, 232  
 Nelson, 411  
 Nero, 63  
*New Writing*, 418  
 Nietzsche, 287, 311, 324  
*No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, 259  
 Nordau, Max, 56  
  
*Of Ants and Men*, 389  
*Old China*, 276  
 Oliphant, Prof., 386  
*Origin of Species*, 364  
*Outline of History (An)*, 34, 35  
  
 Palestrina, 282  
 Palinurus, 117  
 Pascal, 41, 73, 282  
 Pater, W., 95-6, 99, 101, 117, 124  
*Pensées*, 282  
 Pericles, 350, 354  
 Perugino, 383  
 Peter the Great, 63  
 Petronius, 63  
 Picasso, 152, 365  
 Piero della Francesca, 282  
 Plato, 30-1, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 103, 110, 111, 170, 183, 209-12, 251, 252, 255, 286, 336, 402, 406, 415, 417  
 Pliny, 348  
*Polemic*, 418  
 Politian, 383  
 Pompey, 63  
 Pope, 58, 61, 86, 92  
*Power*, 321  
 Priestley, J. B., 306  
*Principles of Geology*, 364  
*Principles of Psychology*, 203  
*Principles of Social Reconstruction*, 45  
 Prior, 92  
 Protagoras, 323  
 Proust, 62



## INDEX OF NAMES

Quennell, Peter, 61

Rabelais, 37, 56, 63

Raleigh, Sir Walter, 354

Rashdall, Dr , 159, 160

*Rationalist Annual*, 98

Rayleigh, Lord, 27-8

Rembrandt, 87

*Renaissance (The)*, 95

Renoir, 279

*Republic*, 103, 323

Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 111, 273

Richardson, 86

Richmond, Sir W , 152

Robbia, della, 383

Rolland, Romain, 176

Ruskin, 83, 98

Russell, Bertrand, 45, 47, 98, 139

*Sacred Table (The)*, 295

Sade, Marquis de, 63

*Sanity of Art (The)*, 56

Sappho, 63

Sargon, 63

Saw Dr , 149, 160

Sayers, Dorothy, 305

Scarlatti, D , 85

Schnabel, 184

Schopenhauer, 307

Schubert, 85, 152, 274, 279

Schumann, 85

*Science and Ethics*, 232

*Science, Religion and Reality*, 316

Shaftesbury, Earl of, 421

Shakespeare, 63, 86, 87, 411

Shaw, 46-7, 56, 297, 310, 396, 397, 405, 406

Shelley, 313

Simpson, 411

Smollett, 86

Socrates, 31, 39, 42, 219, 279

Spencer, Herbert, 37

Stendhal, 62

Sterne, 86

Stevenson, 88

*Stoic (The)*, 286

*Story of Bhanavar the Beautiful (The)*, 284

Strachey, Lytton, 73, 75, 92

Sulla, 63

*Summing Up (The)*, 287

*Supper of Trimalchio*, 63

Swift, 63, 87, 310

*Table Talk*, 61

*Tamburlaine*, 73

Tamerlane, 63

Tchaikowsky, 126

Temple, Archbishop, 164, 189

*Theory of Good and Evil (The)*, 159

*Theory of the Leisure Class (The)*, 328

Thomas, Dylan, 312

Thomson, 58

Thucydides, 111 350

*Time and the Conways*, 306

*Time Must Have a Stop*, 75-7, 101, 300

Tolstoy, 56, 310

Toscanini, 184

*Translation of Homer*, 92

Trevelyan, G M , 91

Trollope, 82

*Turn of the Screw (The)*, 284, 286

Tweedsmuir, Lord, 35

*Two Children (The)*, 306

*Under the Greenwood Tree*, 289

*Unquiet Grave (The)*, 117

Urban, 422

Van Gogh, 152

Veblen, 328

*Venus and Adonis*, 73

Vermeer, 87, 279

Virgil, 58

Voltaire, 37, 47, 50, 63, 92, 310

Waddington, Dr , 231-9

Warren, 411

Waugh, Evelyn, 297

Webster, 86

Welch, Denton, 291, 292

Wellington, 411, 421

*Well (The)*, 284

Wells, H G , 34, 35, 284, 285, 297, 364

Whitehead, 45

Wilde, 13, 62, 63, 358

*Willows (The)*, 284

Wilson, Prof , 133

Woolcott, Alexander, 110

Woolf, Virginia, 64, 99, 287, 297

Wordsworth, 279

Worsley, T C , 295, 296

*Yogi and the Commissar (The)*, 220, 337

Young, 92

